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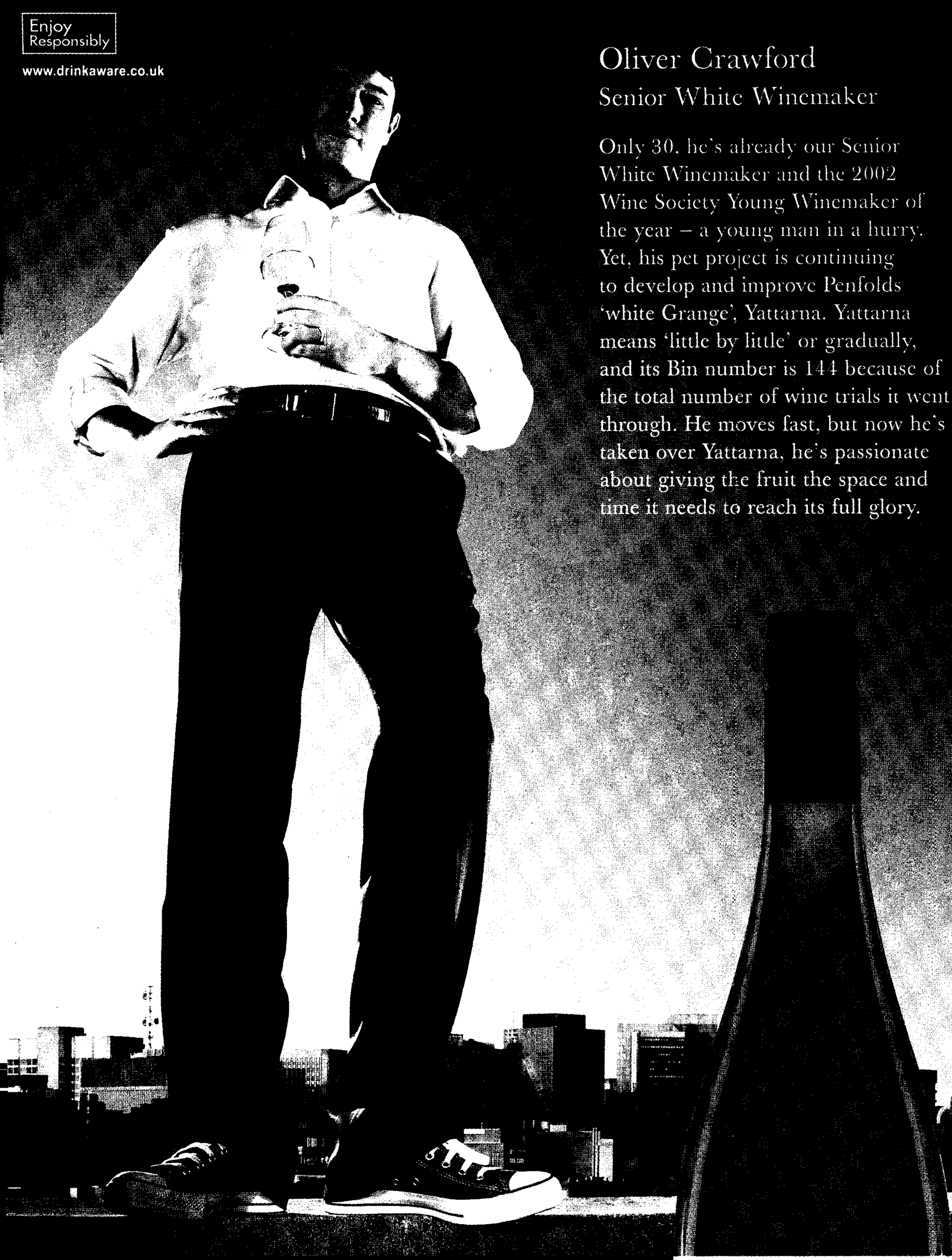

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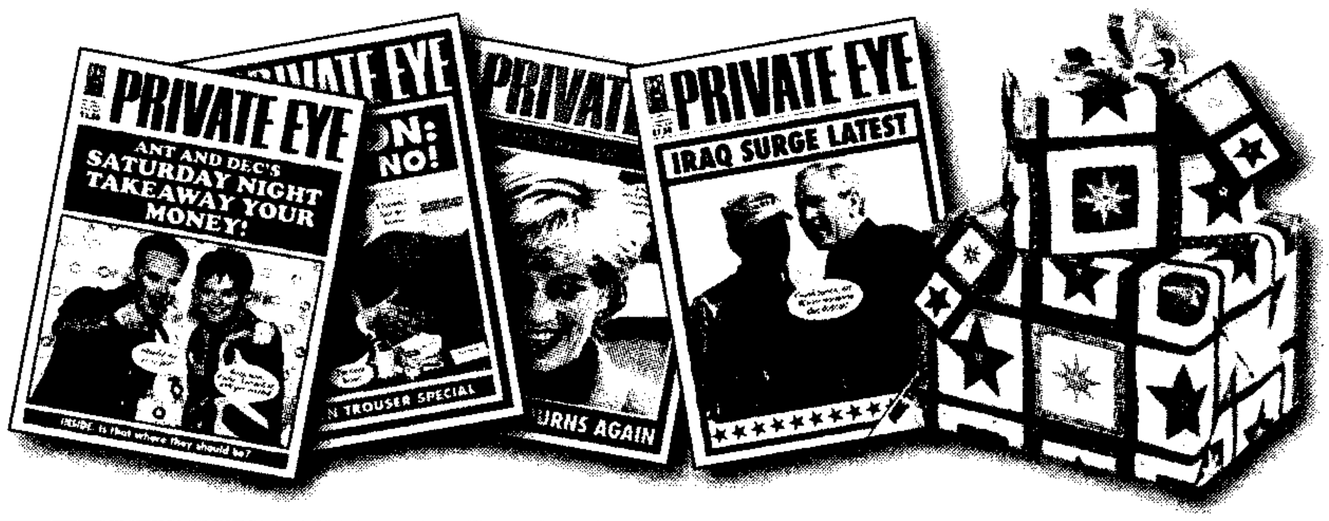

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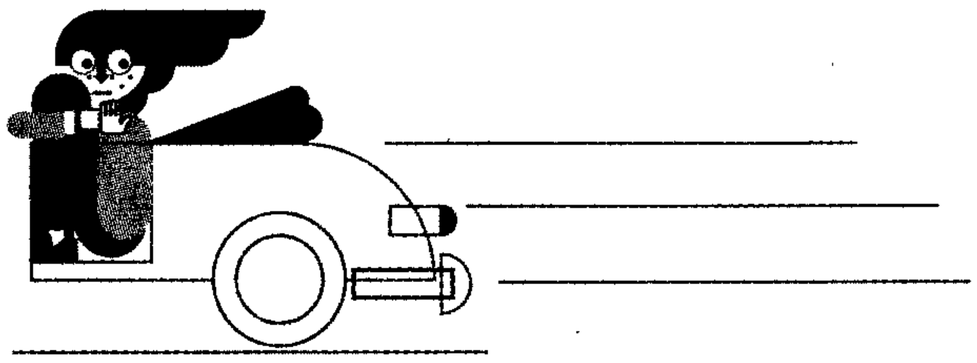

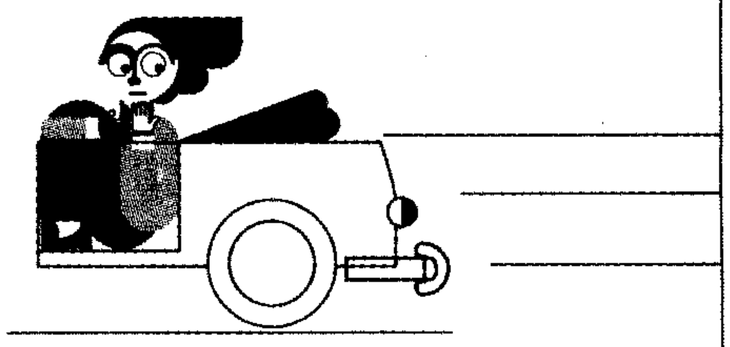

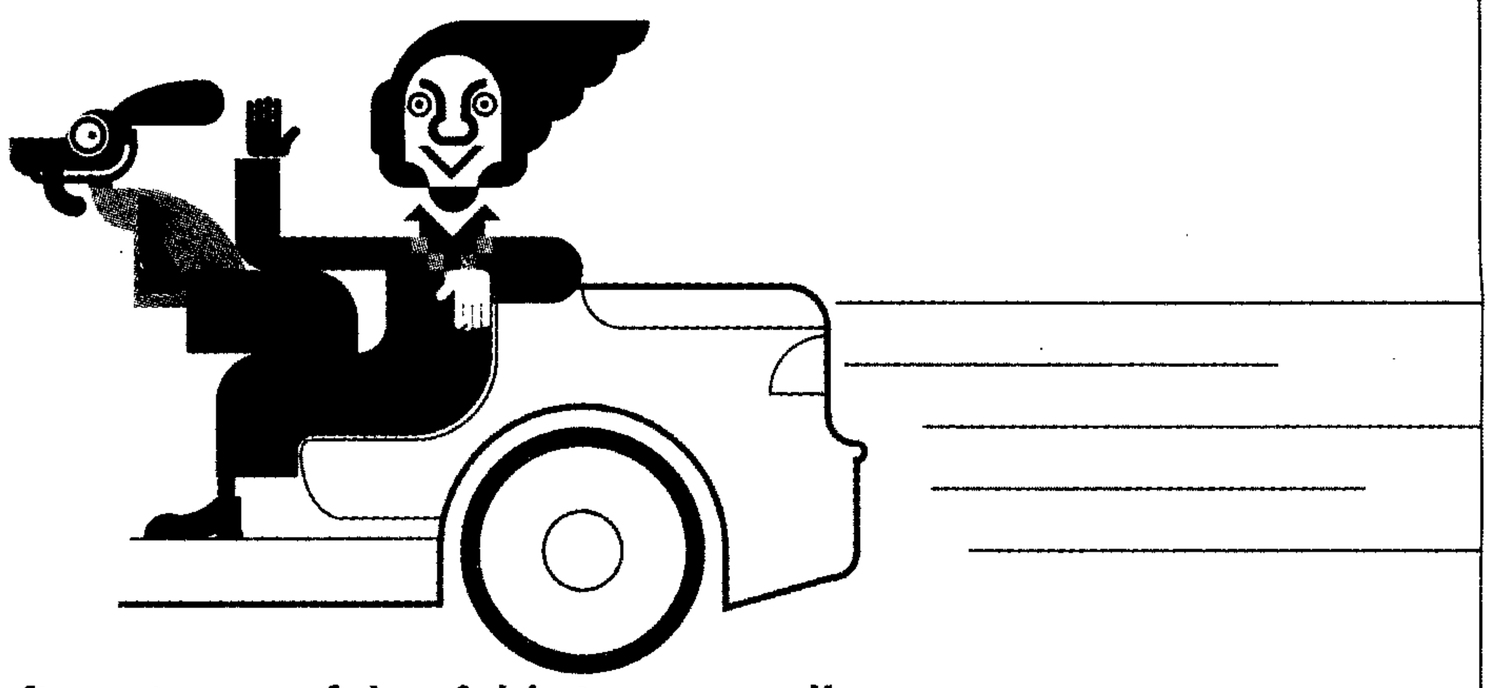

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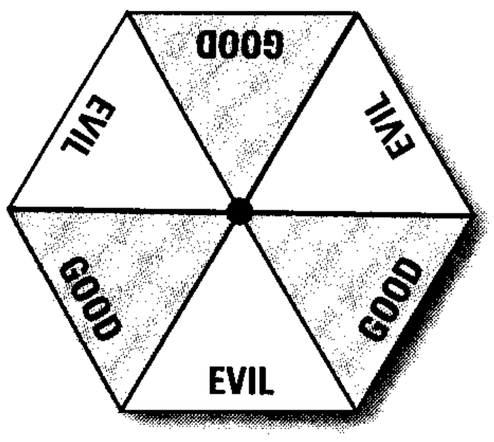

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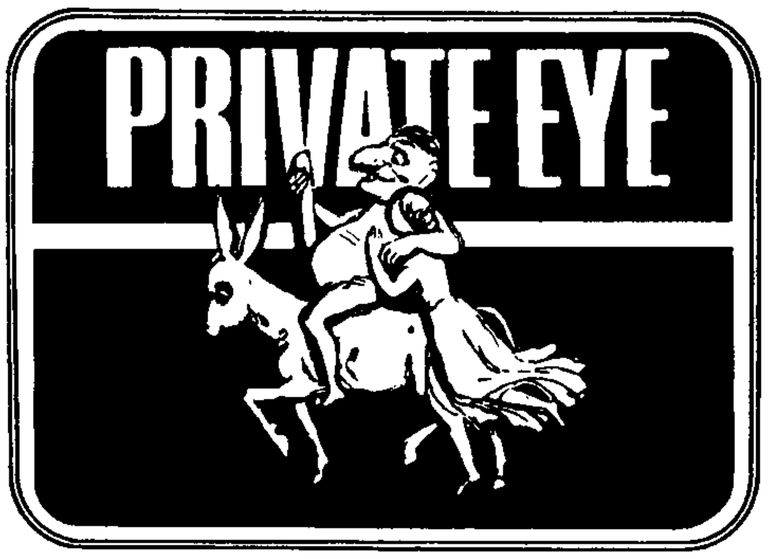

Clearing the Blair

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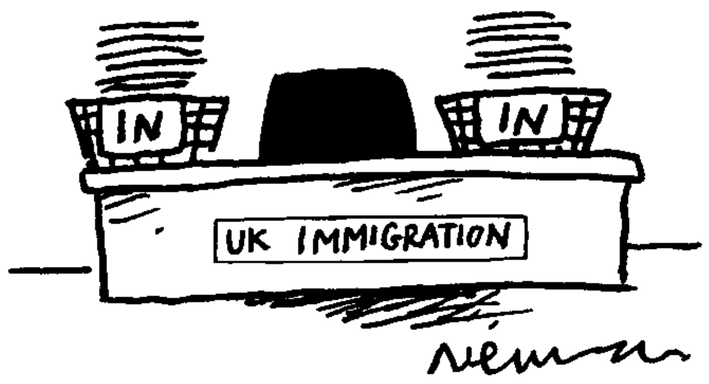


ANOTHER week, another book by Britain's most prolific author. *Wartime Courage* by Gordon Brown (for it is he) has been serialised by the *Daily Telegraph* all this week to prepare readers for Remembrance Sunday with its "tales of extraordinary heroism" during World War II.

This is the prime minister's fourth book in just over a year – the others being *Moving Britain Forward* (September 2006), *Courage: Eight Portraits* (June 2007) and *Britain's Everyday Heroes* (July 2007). A Nobel prize for literature surely can't be far behind. But how does he achieve this amazing output?

In the introduction to *Britain's Everyday Heroes*, Brown explained that it was the product of a "personal journey… round Britain" meeting 33 unsung but splendid men and women. What he forgot to mention was that he didn't actually speak to most of them until just before the book came out: nearly all the interviews were conducted and written up by researchers from the charity Community Links. The only parts of the book that he produced himself were the introduction and the conclusion. Perhaps he was too busy getting on with his book about World War II…

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Former Prime Minister Tony Blair has struck a deal over his Downing Street memoirs, his publisher has said. His account of 10 years as prime minister will be published by Random House, although no publication date has been set. The fee for the memoirs is expected to run into millions of pounds." – *BBC News, 25 October*

"No one wants to see criminals profiting from publishing books about their crimes. Our preferred option, subject to further technical examination, would be for the public to have the right through civil orders to recover payments made to people where these payments can be constituted as benefits of crime."

– *Gordon Brown, speech at Westminster University, 25 October*

THIS month sees the launch of the £50m "People's Lottery Giveaway". The initiative, run by the Big Lottery Fund, the agency responsible for distributing lottery dosh to worthwhile causes, will allow the public to nominate the most deserving charity for a £50m prize pot, as well as 50 other charities which will receive £80,000 each, using the usual interactive voting channels.

A matter that requires much care and diligence, clearly. And which broadcast partner has the Big Lottery Fund chosen for this? Why ITV, of course – home to GMTV, Ant and Dec and other phone scandals that resulted in £7.8m worth of calls being made to premium lines that had already closed.

EYE TOLD YOU SO

Thanks to the many readers who wrote in when Sir John Bourn finally announced his resignation as public spending watchdog.

● *Last word on The Bourn Profligacy, p. 27*

IT APPEARS the Met Police have been up to their old tricks again: shooting dead an innocent man then trying to escape blame by smearing his character.

By the time the Old Bailey had found the Met guilty of "catastrophic" failings over the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes, the force's chief QC, Ronald Thwaites, had suggested on the basis of minute traces of a cocaine derivative in the young Brazilian's urine that he may not have complied with a police challenge, perhaps intending to dispose of drugs in his jacket.

It was an outrageous suggestion: de Menezes had no evidence of drugs on him and no independent witness could be found to support the claim of a police challenge.

But the gutter tactics are nothing new. The Met tried something similar after shooting dead another unarmed and innocent man, Harry Stanley, while he was walking home from a Hackney pub in 1999 (*Eyes passim*). The 46-year-old Scot, mistaken in a tip-off for an Irish terrorist, was carrying a repaired table leg in a plastic bag that officers said might have been a weapon. Having failed to smear Stanley as a feckless drunk, the police circulated a theory that because he was recovering from cancer, he may have provoked the officers in order to carry out a bizarre suicide plan.

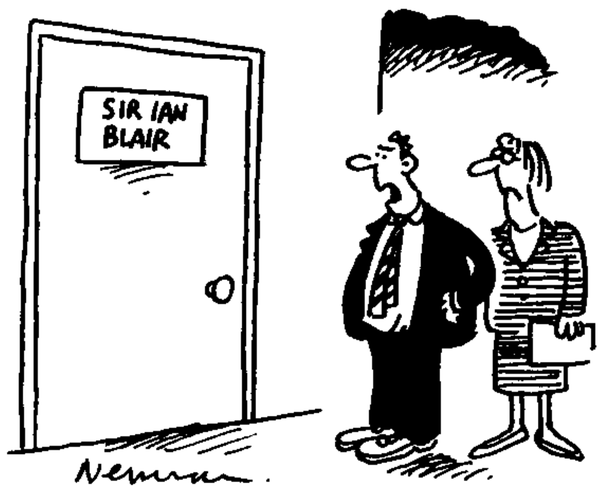
It seems that in defending the de Menezes case to the hilt at the Old Bailey, Inspector Knacker has been only too true to form – another reason why Sir Ian Blair should go.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£560,000 Fine and costs awarded against Met police in the de Menezes case, to be paid from taxpayers' cash

£560,000 Salary of Met police chief Sir Ian Blair for two years, to be paid from taxpayers' cash

£560,000 Salary of ten new Met police constables for two years



"They should fire indiscriminately"

Street of Shame

DURING the Blair years, the *Daily Mail* often castigated editors and columnists who accepted invitations to dine at Chequers or sit on official commissions.

"Time was when political journalists however partisan took pride in concealing their political allegiances," it commented in 2002. "Today… too many flaunt their New Labour credentials. Some were already fully paid-up members of the New Labour project. Others, seduced by favours from the Campbell propaganda machine, have become Blairite groupies."

There are no such sniffy *Mail* editorials about Brownite groupies, and thank God for that. For on 25 October, in his speech about secrecy and freedom, the prime minister announced that he has appointed *Mail* editor Paul Dacre to review the 30-year rule for Whitehall documents.

"Liberty Brown!" yelled the headline on the *Mail*'s report of the PM's "far-reaching proposals". As if that weren't repayment enough, an editorial six days later began with this masterclass in Brown-nosing: "It was a sight we thought we'd never see: Gordon Brown, dressed up in white tie and tails – and very fine he looked too… His immaculate turn-out at the Queen's banquet for King Abdullah would have put Fred Astaire to shame…"

Pass the sickbag, Alice!

TRULY Mr and Mrs Rupert Murdoch are two hearts that beat as one.

In 1999 the Dirty Digger attacked the Dalai Lama as "a very political old monk shuffling around in Gucci shoes" – a quote that has been repeated endlessly ever since by Chinese leaders as endorsement of their Tibetan policy. Now Wendi Deng has given them further ammunition.

After hosting a New York screening last week of the film *Nanking*, which documents Japan's wartime brutality to the Chinese, Wendi was asked: what about the Chinese government's well-documented brutality in Tibet?

"I don't think anyone got killed there!" Wendi declared. "I haven't been there recently, but today everybody in Tibet has mobile phones and the ability to send a message." And she should know: her husband recently appointed her "strategy chief" for MySpace China – which, to keep the Chinese government happy, censors user-comments on topics such as, er, Tibet.

As a News Corp executive explained to the *Los Angeles Times* at the time of the appointment, Rupert "felt safest trusting a member of his family with the delicate assignment. He sees China, with its huge population and rapidly blossoming middle class, as the final frontier for his empire". Who better than gorgeous pouting Wendi to conquer it?

OF THE two controversial new rugby autobiographies, the *Mail on Sunday* chose to serialise Mike Catt's rather than Lawrence Dallaglio's. Last weekend it followed this up by getting team-mate Phil Vickery to condemn the Dallaglio book as "bang out of order".

Dallaglio's memoir, *It's in the Blood*, includes the following observation: "People see the *Mail on Sunday* as somehow more believable and less scandalous than the *News of the World*. The reality, in my view, is that it's probably worse, or certainly on a par. The difficulty was that while a lot of people take the *News of the World* with a pinch of salt, they half-believe the *Mail on Sunday*."

Fancy!

NINE months after the *Daily Express* exclusively revealed the "Terror on the Travelator", after proprietor Richard Desmond's wife fell over on a moving walkway in an airport, the paper had news of another perilous threat faced by unwary tourists.

"Let's save the donkeys" the paper brayed on 27 October, declaring the launch of "our crusade to save the donkeys of Santorini" who are "forced to climb hundreds of steps for tubby tourists" who visit the Greek island. In the course of a week-long series of articles, from a hack and photographer who had been specially dispatched to Santorini, readers were invited to "join the donkey debate at express.co.uk," call one of the paper's premium-rate phone lines to vote on the vital question "Should this cruelty to donkeys be halted now?" or, if they preferred to pay even more for their phone calls, to "vent their anger" directly to the mayor of the local town, whose office number was helpfully provided.

Those who do not object to donkeys being used as, er, beasts of burden were reminded that the practice also holds other dangers: "the ancient stepped path… stinks of muck and urine and many climbing the path on foot are crushed against the walls on the narrow path as the 100 donkeys charge past."

A nosebag of hay and a nice juicy carrot to the first *Eye* reader who can guess where *Daily Express* editor Peter "mentally" Hill went on holiday in October – and phoned home in high dudgeon, having been pushed against a wall and stepped in some fresh donkey poo?

"JUST when you thought she could stoop no lower, Heather Mills has said that as part of her deranged campaign to win back public support, she is even prepared to use private tape recordings, made while she and Paul McCartney were trying to save their marriage," spat columnist Amanda Platell in the *Mail* on 3 November.

Naturally Platell's own employer would have nothing to do with such "vulgar tactics" – as is demonstrated by the *Mail on Sunday*'s "world exclusive" interview in October 2006 with literary agent Peter Cox. Cox claimed to be in possession of recordings of the Beatle's first wife Linda claiming she was "deeply unhappy and depressed about her marriage" and "talked about leaving him".

Just days after the paper enthused that what it called the "sensational McCartney marriage tapes" might "yet play a part in the former Beatle's increasingly rancorous divorce from second wife Heather Mills", McCartney agreed to stump up £200,000 to Cox for the original copies – a negotiation which was exhaustively covered in the following week's *Mail on Sunday*.

"IF C4 didn't exist why would anyone invent it?" demands *Grauniad* media pundit Emily Bell. Her main complaint is that the channel has lost its innovative edge and become "an overtly commercial business".

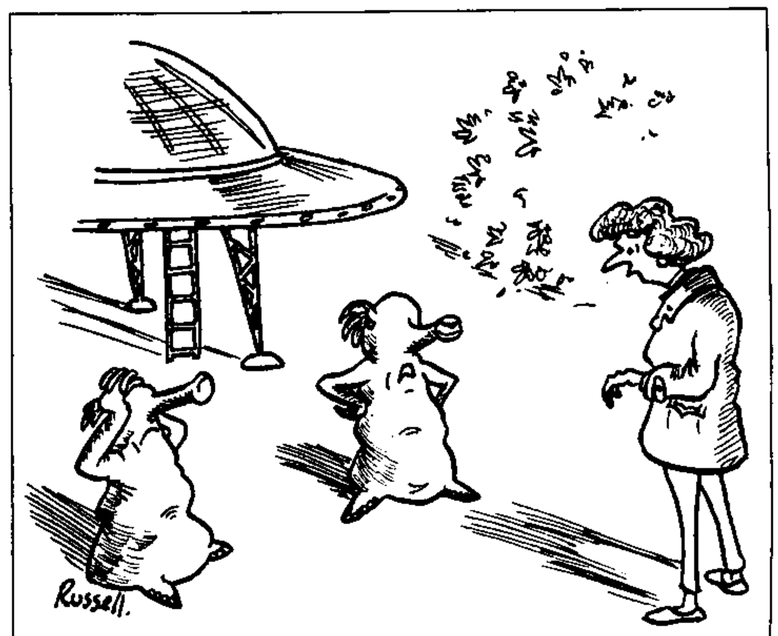
Can this be the same high-minded *Guardian* that recently collected £675m from a deal with private equity firm Apax and is now seeking out new takeover targets? And, come to that, the same paper which in 2005 helped give C4 an overtly commercial shove by financing a "branded series" called *The Guardian Sports Show*?

THE ZZZ-LIST

An occasional column devoted to the least exciting items of celebrity gossip in the national press. Readers' contributions welcomed...

"He may be an emissary of the Almighty but it seems the Archbishop of Canterbury is subject to the same problems as the rest of us. Dr Rowan Williams had been due to board a British Airways flight from Naples to Gatwick – only to find it was cancelled due to a strike… 'He took it all in his stride and seemed content for the airport staff to sort it out,' I am told."

– *Richard Kay diary,* Daily Mail



"Earth? Bloody sat-nav!"

MORE on the litigious Saudi plutocrat Khalid bin Mahfouz (see *Eyes* 1193 and 1194), whose case will finally get underway in New York on 15 November.

The *Eye* has been sent copies of the papers submitted to the judge by Rachel Ehrenfeld, the American author bin Mahfouz successfully sued in London's authoritarian libel courts, and they show how high the stakes have risen.

US publishers, booksellers and newspaper editors are backing Ehrenfeld because of the willingness of British judges, most notably the extraordinary Mr Justice Eady, to issue sweeping global injunctions against authors who have nothing to do with Britain. Ehrenfeld's *Funding Evil* wasn't published here or promoted here. Bin Mahfouz isn't a British citizen and nor is Ehrenfeld. Yet Eady awarded damages to the banker and ordered the censoring of the book. To Americans journalists, who enjoy a constitutionally protected freedom of speech denied to the British, the case is open and shut. Bin Mahfouz has no right to collect damages or tell Americans what they can or can't read just because a limey judge on the other side of the Atlantic doesn't like the robust arguments of free societies.

Legal experts, however, are more cautious. Bin Mahfouz may be a "libel tourist" who has set up a "cottage industry" in the London high court. But it is very rare for the US courts to block an order from a civil court of any western democracy, let alone Britain with which it shares the common law.

Somewhat hilariously, Mahfouz's lawyers are therefore arguing that American courts have no jurisdiction to hear the case (which is a bit rich considering their man is a Saudi who became an Irish citizen and flits into London to use the repressive British courts to censor books that haven't even been published in this country). The case is "trivial" and "semantic", they continue, and not worth hearing. To which Ehrenfeld replies that America had a revolution to get away from the likes of Mr Justice Eady, and ever since has believed that freedom of speech is the indispensable freedom.

MEANWHILE Jonathan Freedland recently found the time to send a message to *Index on Censorship* editor Jo Glanville demanding that her journal expose the threat to free speech posed by Saudi billionaire Khalid bin Mahfouz, whose litigious antics have been chronicled in the *Eye* (see above).

In reply, Glanville pointed out that the only two publications in Britain which *have* reported on Mahfouz's fusillade of libel writs are the *Eye* and, er, *Index on Censorship* – whereas Freedland's own paper, the *Grauniad*, has still not summoned up the courage to print a dicky-bird.

YET another awestruck *Guardian* piece about the Indian outsourcing and consulting company Infosys – this time a full-page news feature, hot on the heels of a full-page profile of Infosys boss Kris Gopalakrishnan.

But still no mention of the fact that Infosys has recently been working with the *Guardian*. Perhaps it'll appear in the next full-page Infosys piece – which, on current form, should be along in a week or so.

CONGRATULATIONS to Alex West, a rookie reporter on the *Sun* who pulled in last week's big scoop – án exclusive warning from Home Office Security Minister Admiral Lord Alan West that "Britain is facing a 30-year war to defeat terror".

The interview may have appeared under the byline of chief reporter John Kay, but the youngster, who only joined the paper in September, played an instrumental part in securing the interview with Lord West – or as he calls him, Dad.

FEUDS CORNER

IN THE week of *Observer* editor Roger Alton's resignation, the *Mail on Sunday*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Independent* and the *Daily Mail* all reported how Nick Davies's book *Flat Earth News* was part of a rancid feud between the *Guardian* and *Observer* in which the two papers' editor-in-chief Alan Rusbridger had commissioned Davies to attack Alton in order to get rid of him because a) he was jealous of the *Observer*'s success and/or b) the leftie anti-war sandal-wearing *Guardian* was using Davies to take its revenge on the pro-war "neo cons" running the *Obs*.

However, Rusbridger did *not* put Davies up to writing his one admittedly very rude chapter about the *Observer* and its attitude to the war. (There are also chapters on the *Mail* and the *Sunday Times,* but most of the book is a general overview of malpractice in the whole of Fleet Street.) As it happens, when he saw the *Observer* material, Rusbridger was less than amused.

He had promised to serialise Davies's book in the *Grauniad*; but if he ran extracts which included attacks on the *Obs* he would be accused of backstabbing (as he was when he let the *Guardian* rubbish a string of *Observer* "exclusives" earlier in the year). If he left out the rude chapter about Alton & Co, he'd be accused of protecting his own titles while attacking others. Rubbisher therefore took the principled decision and dropped the serialisation altogether!

ROGER ALTON's resignation from the *Observer* exposed "a long-running feud" over its direction and profitability, panted Andrew Pierce and Dominic White in the *Daily Telegraph* on 26 October.

Alton went, they said, because he was "fiercely protective of his newspaper's independence from the *Guardian*" and objected to tackling losses by integrating the Sunday, daily and online operations.

Curiously, that is also an exact description of why *Sunday Telegraph* editor Patience Wheatcroft left in September. Did Pierce and White see fit to draw this analogy? They did not. Nor has the *Telegraph* ever, in any of its manifestations, felt the need to inform readers of her departure.

JUST FANCY THAT!

THRILLING news from William Ellis school in north London, where Alastair Campbell's partner Fiona Millar is vice-chairwoman of the governors: this year's recipients of the Baxter Awards have been revealed.

The award scheme, named after a former headmaster, dishes out sums of up to £5,000 to certain ex-pupils who are starting higher education. As the current head explains, the money is allocated to "deserving cases, and especially those for whom an award can make a significant difference when their families are deciding whether or not further education is affordable". This year's deserving cases include one Calum Campbell, who has just started reading history and politics at Manchester University.

Shome mishtake, shurely. Has Calum's dad Alastair really spent *all* the £1m advance from Random House for his diaries? Will he soon be selling *The Big Issue*? It is all a great mystery.

HACKWATCH

Roger and out

SO. Farewell then Roger Alton, editor of the *Observer*. After several years of trench warfare between the *Observer* and its big brother, the *Grauniad*, these venerable liberal journals are to be brought together as a new "24/7 electronic paper", sharing many staff and functions.

How this techno-utopian vision can be achieved without violence is anyone's guess. But even if a new era of peace and harmony really is dawning, Alton's departure deserves to be marked with a few highlights from his turbulent years at the helm. We shall not look upon their like again…

1999: A year into his editorship, with *Observer* hacks threatening industrial action over a pay claim, Alton assures management that he'll head off the strike by making a "conciliatory and emollient" speech. When the hacks duly assemble for his friendly pep talk, the editor is tact incarnate. "Fuck you!" he yells. "If you want to strike, go ahead!"

2001: Alton sends a memo to all *Observer* hacks: "SWEARING. Frightful lot of swearing going on in the paper nowadays, and an alarming number of cunts in the sports pages, so to speak. While we're obviously a grown-up paper – and I don't want to sound like the Bishop of Dundee – do keep an eye and please see me if there is any level of doubt." A few weeks later BBC hack John Sweeney has a five-minute telephone chat with Alton which includes – on Sweeney's side – 27 "fucks" and almost as many "cunts". When shocked staff in the neighbouring *Money Box* office complain, Sweeney is unrepentant. "It is," he explains, "the only language Roger understands."

2002: Alton takes a dozen of his department heads off to an Oxfordshire hotel to discuss the question: where does the *Observer* go from here. The hacks quickly provide the answer: to the bar. After dinner, news editor Andy Malone tells City editor Frank Kane: "You're fucking pissed, you wanker." Kane retaliates by singing old IRA songs about cutting Englishmen's throats. "Fuck off, wanker!" yells Malone, known as the Barlinnie Bruiser because he previously worked for the Scottish prison service. A few drinks later, after being thumped by the Bruiser, Kane falls over a fire grate and breaks several ribs. Malone then keels over himself, dead drunk, and injures a leg. A football match the next morning, organised by Alton as a "team-building exercise", turns into a riot of wild tackling and mud-wrestling in which review editor Tim Adams gets a broken nose. When Alton returns to the office he wanders unsteadily around the newsroom with a faraway look in his eye. "Fuck, fuck, fuck," he mutters over and over again. "What the fuck's happening to this paper?"

2003: In a speech at his leaving party, *Observer* hack Burhan Wazir recalls Alton asking him if the paper should investigate white supremacists. When Wazir agreed it was a good idea, the editor asked: "What about you trying to infiltrate them?" Wazir then pointed to the colour of his skin. "Fuck!" Alton groaned. "Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!"

2004: As *Observer* staff bid farewell to the offices they have shared with the *Grauniad*, before moving to a nearby building, Alton knows what's on their minds. "Well, folks," he tells the throng assembled on the newsfloor, "tonight's your last chance to shag each other on the desks."

2005: The *Observer* editor joins Piers Morgan's *UK Press Gazette* team at the River Café quiz – which, to universal amazement, they win. Alton is none too pleased by a sniffy piece on the MediaGuardian website suggesting that he contributed little or nothing to the victory. "That's just bollocks, that's written by Alan Rusbridger, that is," he yells. "He's obviously pissed off because we beat his team. Anyway, the important thing is that we won and beat all those middle-class wankers."

2006: The long-simmering animosity between Alton's two senior lieutenants, Kamal Ahmed and John Mulholland, finally turns to violence. With nerves fraught as the day for the *Observer*'s Berliner redesign looms, and both Ahmed and Mulholland ruthlessly competing to succeed Alton when he finally quits the stage, they come to blows in an argument about deadlines and have to be pulled apart by the editor – who himself was recently involved in a bout of fisticuffs with a member of his design team. A few days later Alton is interviewed by the *Independent* about the relaunch. "I've got fuck-all to say of any interest so this should be a very short piece," he declares. "But please don't make me sound like a cunt." Desperate for any usable quote, the interviewer asks for his expert assessment of the Sunday newspaper market. "Tight as fuck," the editor replies. Soon afterwards he dispatches another memo to *Observer* hacks: "Sorry if this is a bit pots and kettles, but reading proofs over the last couple of days I have noticed about three 'fucks' or 'fuckings'… Can all section editors make sure that doesn't happen?" Later in the year, however, comes an event to which expletives are the only possible reaction. "Fuck!" Alton shouts when he hears the news. "Shit! Really? No! Fucking hell!" A ministerial resignation? An al-Qaeda attack? No, it's the announcement that Britney Spears is divorcing her husband.

2007: The editor tries in vain to arrange an exclusive valedictory interview with Tony Blair. "For fuck's sake!" he tells colleagues. "You spend all those years with your head rammed up the guy's arse…" No danger of that with Blair's successor, however: Alton declares his intention of doing everything he can to "fuck over Gordon Brown". Meanwhile, what of Alton's own future? In late September he denies rumours that he'll quit over the 7-day integration of the *Observer* and *Guardian*, assuring concerned colleagues that he "couldn't be having more fun". A month later he hands in his notice.

100 YEARS AGO

IN September 1986, the *Eye* ran the first of many articles exposing the vile David Cocks QC, then chair of the Criminal Bar Association.

Having impregnated young barrister Felicity Hammerton, Cocks had her thrown out of chambers after she refused an abortion. When the baby was born – a son, also called David – he denied paternity. A court recognised him as the father, however, and ordered him to support the boy.

For the first 12 years, the fox-hunting QC paid a princely £16.24 a week, leaving Hammerton to bring up their son in a council flat in Camden. (Cocks, by contrast, owns a 200-acre estate in Devon.) Hammerton spent much of the 1980s and 1990s embroiled in court proceedings applying to have the payments raised while Cocks applied to reduce them. At one point Cocks shamelessly applied for her to pay his £35,000 court costs – even though he had lost the case.

The saga concluded last week when Cocks agreed to pay £100,000 to David in a final settlement. Cocks shouldn't have a problem finding the loot: his annual earnings at the Bar are £750,000.

"Brick or treat?"

WHY did Gordon Brown finally give the green light to Crossrail?

Mayor Livingstone heartily backs the scheme, which, given Gordon's loathing for Ken, was hardly likely to endear the project to him. But lobbying by the US multinational Bechtel, which aims to build on its existing Crossrail work, may have had more impact. As the *Eye* revealed in issue 1176, Riley Bechtel – one of America's richest men – personally lobbied then transport minister Douglas Alexander in the company of the former MP Lawrie Quinn, previously Alexander's private parliamentary secretary and subsequently employed as a Bechtel lobbyist.

Unlike Livingstone, Alexander is very close to Brown. One hopes that the curse of Alexander (most of the things he has persuaded Brown to do have gone wrong) will not come to haunt Crossrail, too.

PS: Generous to a fault, Bechtel paid for transport minister Jim Fitzpatrick and his wife to go to this year's Chelsea Flower Show and have a slap-up dinner afterwards. Why such largesse? It surely can't have anything to do with Fitzpatrick's Poplar constituency being on the Crossrail route…

● *See Signal Failures p. 12*

PLANS to privatise training of the armed forces, six years in gestation, are in disarray after the Ministry of Defence last month pulled half the £16bn PFI deal it was negotiating with Metrix, a consortium of Qinetiq, EDS and Land Securities.

While "package 1" of the contract, for equipment and engineering training, goes ahead, "package 2" on logistics, security, intelligence, personnel and policing has been pulled (that is, "work to explore possible synergies and economies of scale across the programme as a whole has concluded that there are insufficient efficiencies to move forward", as Defence Minister Derek Twigg put it).

As far more sites and about half the MoD's training staff are covered by the abandoned package, the decision poses serious questions about the £2bn savings the deal is supposed to deliver (details of which the MoD won't divulge but which almost certainly involve the usual PFI fiddle factors).

The word is that the RAF was happy to go along with the package 1 sell-off, which was largely on its patch, but the army put its foot down on package 2 where it had more say.

IN HIS crowd-pleasing attack on MPs' soaring pay and expenses last week, David Cameron said he'd happily work for half his current salary of £130,000. This looks like an easy attempt to curry favour, given that his wife is on a tidy packet at Smythson and also happens to be the daughter of a very wealthy landowner.

But is it true? When he was a humble run-of-the-mill MP Dave didn't seem quite so willing to live on a backbencher's salary: he topped it up with a directorship of Urbium plc, while also collecting more than £20,000 a year in consultancy fees from Carlton plc.

Cameron's criticism of MPs' expenses claims is rather surprising too, given that his own annual expenses of £143,385 are well above the parliamentary average. Moreover, most MPs don't have access to free air travel, whereas in the register of interests Dave lists no fewer than 14 individuals and companies that have generously given him free flights in their private jets and whirlybirds. And if he feels a bit peckish, he can always gorge himself on one of the free Harrods hampers that he regularly receives from the Sultan of Brunei.

CALLED TO ORDURE

COMMONS backbenchers, already puny, have been weakened still further after a debate on the modernisation of the House that was so unimportant to its leader, Harriet Harman, that she pushed off halfway through.

The vote, in which just 110 MPs participated, effectively robbed the bloody-minded contingent of the ability to organise "motions of substance", which allow them to have a vote on controversial subjects. These always used to be a good way of biting a government's backside, particularly on issues ministers want to ignore (eg Iraq wars).

By way of compensation, MPs have been offered more private members' bills, when maverick proposals are floated before being exterminated by the government. Great!

Best speech in the debate was made by Richard Shepherd, Tory MP for Aldridge-Brownhills, who dated the slow decline of backbencher powers to the Thatcher years. He compared the "leaden" way the Commons recently handled the war in Iraq to the "vitality" with which the US Congress treated it. "In five years we have had – I think – three debates on the war. Who could be responsible for that? Standing Order 41 gives the government absolute pre-eminence in the selection of debates."

Surprise, surprise, there are no plans to change Standing Order 41. But then the whole "modernisation of the House" thing was a scam set up in Tony Blair's first term. For "modernisation" you might insert "castration", because the committee which looks after it has been packed with party narks. The Tories' main fixer on the committee is Greg Knight, a jokey authoritarian who has little time for MPs with their own ideas.

The modernisation committee took over from the old procedure committee, which was jealous of parliament's ability to check the executive. The modernisation lot, however, are largely in hock to the party hierarchies and view parliament as a rubber-stamping operation for governments.

Shepherd had just described the importance of giving individual MPs greater rights to call votes – "the very essence of what parliament should be about" – when he noticed that Harman had scarpered. As leader of the Commons she is supposed to defend backbenchers' rights. She had also opened the debate. It was at the very least bad manners not to listen to other senior MPs.

Harman's mad-granny deputy, Helen Goodman, explained that Harriet had "been in the chamber for some six hours and needed something to eat so that she did not get a headache". The debate itself had been going for three hours at this point.

Shepherd was withering: "I am very glad to hear about her domestic arrangements; one is interested in that." As for Goodman, she later refused to allow Bill Cash (Con, Stone) to intervene in the debate on the grounds that he had not been present for the entire debate. He had been on parliamentary duties elsewhere rather than scoffing in the canteen, but it's plainly one rule for "Headache" Harman, another for backbenchers.

As a result of the modernisation vote the speaker of the Commons will have greater powers to time-limit MPs' speeches – down to perhaps even three minutes. Pleased-with-himself Bercow (Con, Buckingham), who fancies himself as a future speaker, kept bouncing to his feet with erratic, ornate interventions helpful to the modernisation agenda. But his speakership ambitions may have been wrecked by acceptance of a non-ministerial government position from Gordon "All The Talents" Brown; many Tories cannot bear Bercow now.

He certainly behaved like a prat when attacking Shepherd's call for greater backbench powers. He suggested that Shepherd felt that "the world has been going progressively downhill since the 11th century and probably for some period before". Shepherd flicked this aside. "That was an absurd intervention."

Why was such a momentous debate so poorly attended? Because the whips arranged it for a Thursday afternoon, knowing most hon. members would have buggered off home by that point in the week. The debate was itself curtailed by clock restrictions, Goodman refusing to allow MPs to question her arguments because she said she had insufficient time.

It was hardly that late in the day. Twenty minutes after the debate ended the Commons knocked off for the week – at just 5.35pm.

'Gavel Basher'

STOP THE WAR!

BORN out of fierce opposition to the Iraq war, the Respect "Unity Coalition" has now descended into the kind of full-blown faction fight so dear to the hearts of the loonier left.

As the *Eye* predicted four months ago, George Galloway's East London-based empire has finally imploded, with divorce imminent between the MP's acolytes and the Socialist Workers' Party.

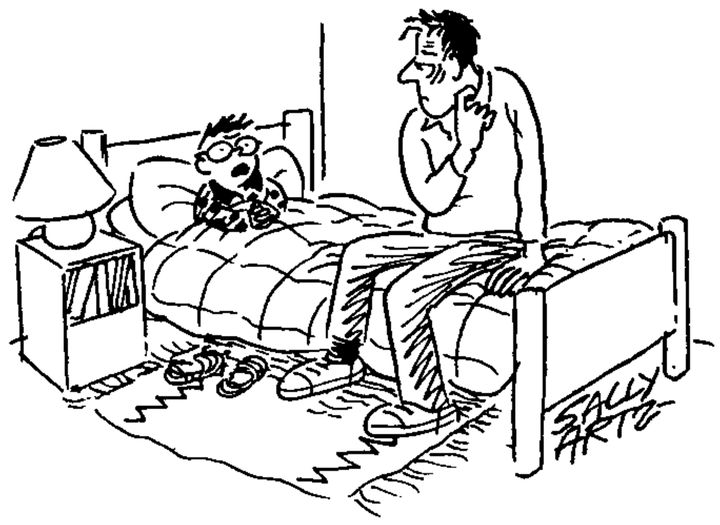
Instead of spending his 18-day House of Commons suspension helping constituents, "Gorgeous" George has been occupied for most of the past month baiting his fellow Stop the War leader and SWP bigwig, John Rees. The pair now so loathe each other that Galloway told a group of Rees's comrades: "Go on, fuck off! Fuck off the lot of you!" as they stormed out of a Tower Hamlets branch meeting.

The Rees faction countered by expelling from the SWP the MP's two parliamentary aides, Rob Hoveman and Kevin Ovenden, for a "breach of discipline" and changed the passwords on the office computers.

Meanwhile four of Respect's 11 Bengali councillors on Tower Hamlets council have resigned the party whip to become "Respect Independents." This left-leaning rump which, surreally, is in negotiations with the Lib Dems about a council coalition, is backed by Rees. They all hate the leader of the main Respect group, Cllr Abjol Miah. They accuse him of favouring only the Bengali community, disrespecting (*geddit?*) women members and betraying the founding principles of Respect.

Miah (who was fingered by Ed Hussain, author of *The Islamist*, as one of the more radical elements of the 1990s East London Mosque) has built himself a powerful following among the Muslim small business community. He will, therefore, be useful in delivering votes for Galloway's attempt to take transport minister Jim Fitzpatrick's seat in Poplar and Limehouse at the next general election. The *quid pro quo* is Galloway's backing for Miah to take over from himself at Bethnal Green and Bow. Rees and Co decry such grubbing around after votes.

There now seems to be no coalition, very little unity, and certainly no respect. Oh, comrades!



"So much for sex. Now explain the differences between Labour and Conservative policies"

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

DOES the European Commission ever listen or learn from past mistakes?

It has just been asked a series of blunt questions about political appointees and corruption in its anti-fraud office, OLAF, by the same man who raised similar concerns about OLAF eight years ago.

Dutch MEP Paul Van Buitenen, founder of the Transparent Europe party and an independent in the Greens' European Free Alliance, has questioned the Commission over "strong political interference" by senior MEPs, the parliament's president Hans-Gert Pöttering, Socialist Party chair Martin Schulz and representatives of the German government in the re-election of OLAF's discredited director-general, Franz Hermann Brüner.

Although Brüner was near the bottom of the heap in the final selection process by independent experts, he was miraculously restored to power in 2005. His efforts to stifle the Eurostat investigations by Stern journalist Hans-Martin Tillack (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*) resulted in Tillack's arrest by Belgian police on unfounded bribery allegations.

The European ombudsman voiced disgust at OLAF in a report which was ignored not only by OLAF, but the commission and later the European parliament too. But one OLAF director has leapt to its defence: Nicholas Ilett, who claimed that all its operations were legal and regular. Yet Ilett, according to the ombudsman, "misled Mr Tillack by wrongly claiming that OLAF did not store any personal data" on him in 2005. Following this nasty allegation, Ilett was rapidly promoted *(Eyes passim)*.

EU-phemisms

It will be expensive, bureaucratic and it won't work

A former assistant auditor in the commission, van Buitenen's revelations of fraud and mismanagement forced the entire European Commission to resign eight years ago. He was suspended for his efforts and later resigned, returning as an MEP in 2004.

Now, the only official responding to his allegations over OLAF is Brüner – who is demanding the European parliament bring legal action against Van Buitenen for breaching rules of procedure!

THE European parliament is fighting a rearguard action against a request from the EU ombudsman, and refusing to publish details of expenses payments to MEPs.

Unlike salaries, which are paid by the MEPs' home country, expenses come from the parliament's account. MEPs monitor the payments themselves via their budgetary control committee.

Excuses given so far for non-publication are that it would take "too much time" or that the data protection rights of MEPs' assistants would be infringed. There are even mutterings in parliament about fighting fire with fire by creating a fuss about the cost of the increase in staffing at the ombudsman's office!

The most likely reason for the MEPs' outraged response is that they don't want embarrassing details to emerge: for example, how much of the £10,300 MEPs receive each month to pay their assistants is actually, er, paid to assistants. Some MEPs are perhaps more generous than others, such as Robert Kilroy-Silk and Liberal Democrat Diane Wallis, whose assistants also happen to be their spouses.

MEPs also get £195 a day simply for turning up to sessions in Brussels and Strasbourg. For years allegations have circulated about parliamentarians who sign the attendance register then simply bugger off for the rest of the day.

NEWS FROM THE SANDPIT

IRANIAN-supplied IEDs (improvised explosive devices) continue to be a huge problem in and around Basra after the withdrawal of British forces from Saddam's Palace to the airport.

Every device is different, of course, but there is one type of triggering system that identifies various types of bomb as specifically Iranian: those that are primed by radio control as a target approaches and then detonated as the target breaks an infra-red beam.

Back in 2004 an army bomb disposal technician ended up with a price on his head after upsetting local Shias and their backers in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard by defusing so many of these devices that forensic specialists were handed the proof needed to link their manufacture and supply directly to Iran.

The lads started to notice other connections too. The ways that devices are placed became far more sophisticated, thanks to lessons from Hezbollah and Iranian experts. These days, devices are placed according to the kinds of vehicle that insurgents expect to attack.

Bombs are placed higher up, for example, to kill soldiers providing "top cover" from the hatches cut into Snatch Land Rovers. Other devices sport two detonators: inexperienced Iraqi policemen have taken devices "made safe" back to their compounds for analysis, unaware that the second detonator still works rather well.

More sophisticated devices require more time to defuse – time that allows a sniper the opportunity to take good aim. Such bombs are placed in positions with little or no cover for disposal technicians.

So what is being done to cut off the supply of these munitions from Iran? Surprisingly little. Despite warnings from the Saudi Foreign Minister, King Abdullah of Jordan and various coalition intelligence organisations, Iranian weapons and personnel turn up in southern Iraq on a regular basis. Attempts to disrupt their progress are covert and "deniable" if they go "tits up", as they say at the MoD. There is little parliamentary enthusiasm for annoying the Iranian government with more direct action.

Chris Hunter, a bomb disposal officer who wrote about his four-week tour in *Eight Lives Down*, is among those who remember his unit's one and only fact finding visit from a member of parliament. It was from the then Secretary of Defence Geoff Hoon, who managed to fall asleep halfway through his briefing.

'Square Basher'

NUMBER CRUNCHING

8 in 2 days Events attended by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia during his state visit last week

8 in 2 days Prisoners beheaded in Saudi Arabia last week

Down on the Farm

ONLY with trepidation does this column return to the vexed subject of badgers and the great bovine TB crisis which has Britain's dairy industry on the rack.

No other issue attracts such a storm of coordinated vituperation, filling our correspondence columns with letters for weeks. But the recent intervention from the government's chief scientist, Sir David King, strikes at the heart of the main argument which the badger-lobby has used for years to support its claims that the cause of the current epidemic of TB in cattle is not the epidemic of TB in badgers, and furthermore that culling diseased badgers where TB is most rife would only end up spreading the disease further. It is something of a world-first for this column to call in aid anything said by the chief scientist. It was King, it may be remembered, who was appointed by Tony Blair at the height of the 2001 foot and mouth epidemic, and who was then responsible for putting Professor Roy Anderson in charge of government policy – the man who initiated the disastrous and illegal pre-emptive cull which resulted in the needless destruction of some 8m healthy animals.

Now, however, King has turned his attention to badgers: specifically to the report produced earlier this year by Professor John Bourne, the man chosen by the government to come up with "scientific" reasons it did not need to sanction a badger-cull. Bourne based his conclusions on the so-called "Krebs trials", which as critics have been pointing out for years appeared to have been deliberately designed to prove that culling badgers would have no effect on TB in cattle. This was because so many badgers were "perturbed" by the clumsy methods used to effect a very limited cull of badgers that they simply escaped the traps, fanning out into the surrounding countryside to spread the disease still further.

Whenever the culling issue arose, the badger lobby piled in to quote the Krebs trial and Bourne's views, as chairman of the government's supposedly "independent" advisory group, as showing that a full-scale cull would be worse than useless. But now King has published a review of Bourne's latest report, pointing out what all Bourne's critics have been urging for years: that the Krebs trials were hopelessly flawed and that any conclusions Bourne drew from them were hopelessly unscientific.

King's verdict may have been dressed up in the cautious language of a bureaucratic scientist ("we have concerns about the biological plausibility of the ISG's interpretation of the results"), but it was nevertheless damning – and has been viewed by the badger lobby as designed to justify a Defra U-turn in allowing the mass-cull which for years it has been resisting.

Interestingly, King did not stray outside his brief to mention the single most powerful experiment which showed just how effective a cull of diseased badgers can be in halting the spread of TB in cattle: the so-called "Four Area Trial" in Ireland which demonstrated, for instance, that killing TB-infected badgers in Donegal reduced TB in cattle by 96 percent. Nor did King touch on what to the government must have become one of the most persuasive arguments of all in favour of a cull to halt the TB crisis in Britain's cattle: the official projection that by 2014, the bill to taxpayers could have totalled a staggering £2bn. But when money on that scale is at stake, it is advisable to get the scientists on side to show that you would be right to change your policy.

'Muckspreader'

"I accidentally culled Alistair Darling"

TV

Joe's Palace (BBC1)
Britz (Channel 4)

AT A TIME when newspaper editorialists and veteran film-makers are getting in a froth over BBC plans to cut factual and documentary output, it's worth remembering that an entire swathe of fiction disappeared from TV within recent memory without much of a murmur from anyone.

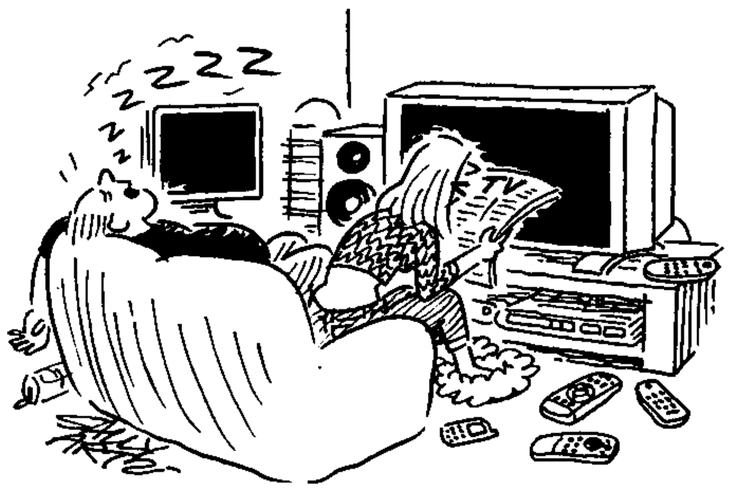
Until the mid-80s, the main terrestrial channels would reserve as many as 60-70 slots a year for the one-off drama, the latest script from Alan Bleasdale, Alan Bennett or Trevor Griffiths, known in the sacred jargon as "the single play."

But budget cuts and a retreat from contemporary issues to period pieces intervened and many of the dramatists in the generation after Dennis Potter – such as Jimmy McGovern, Russell T Davies and Paul Abbott – have been happiest in the long-running serial form. So there are probably now only two writers who can raise the money for big one-off projects in which the scriptwriter has the status of auteur: Stephen Poliakoff and Peter Kosminsky.

By a freak of scheduling, the latest pieces from these two were scheduled in a five-day period this week. So how do these relics of one of television's most popular genres look? Should we be nostalgic for the days when one-offs were once a week?

Well, **Joe's Palace** won't have done much for the blood-pressure and ulcers of those disgruntled telly writers who gather in London and Liverpool taverns to complain that Stephen Poliakoff can get away with anything. While most would-be screenwriters are lectured that the channels are only interested in fast and contemporary dramas which "reflect the lives of the audience" and, notoriously, "the smell of Britain", Polly has managed, yet again, to get a stack of wonga to write and direct a story about eccentric rich people drifting around vast and picturesque houses in southern England.

In 2005's *Friends and Crocodiles*, Jodhi May was employed by a moneyed weirdo who sat in a grand mansion collecting establishment figures around him and fanatically cataloguing his life.



"So... television, DVD, interactive...? Or would you rather listen to a CD, pod-cast, digital radio...?"

Now, in *Joe's Palace*, Danny Lee Wynter is employed by a wacky fat-cat who is looking for a researcher to sit in his massive pile and research the family history. The only obvious departure from the earlier narrative – or, in fact, 2001's *Perfect Strangers*, in which a seriously loaded bloke got someone to dig into his relatives – is that the billionaire in this one doesn't actually live in his telegenic slice of real estate but spies on it from a flat across the road.

Poliakoff began as a rule-breaker but his recent work, always breaking the same rules, risks becoming as much of a genre as police and medical shows. Nobody except Dennis Potter has been given as much creative control as Poliakoff in his recent projects and, while Polly hasn't yet produced a *Blackeyes* or a *Karaoke*, *Joe's Palace* alarmingly suggests he may be heading that way.

With docu-dramas such as *Warriors* and *The Government Inspector*, Peter Kosminsky has been the best bet in recent years for stopping the drama Baftas going to Poliakoff. But, after previously restricting himself to bringing the cool stamp of fact to scripts written by others, Kosminsky, like his rival, has now become a writer-director with **Britz**.

The Government Inspector, which dramatised the death of Dr David Kelly, took strong liberties even for the slippery genre of "faction", using composite characters and presenting as fact an action by Andrew Gilligan which can only be at very best a hypothesis. *Britz*, though, is entirely fictional and, indeed, fantastical as siblings from the same Muslim family become respectively an MI5 officer and an al-Qaeda terrorist.

The way these storylines eventually collide would be considered fanciful even in a glossy fantasy like *Spooks*, but Kosminsky shoots it all in his distanced verité style, giving the impression that his barmy yarn is objective truth. Then, in the final moments, the screen is given over to an anti-Blair and anti-west editorial from one character, speaking directly to screen, completely subverting the pretence of balance in the previous four hours.

With all commissioners preferring to spend their drama budgets on a few big projects, these two pieces represent a very large proportion of the energy and effort in the genre at the moment. They make you wonder if the money might more sensibly be spread.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

BROADCASTING unions BECTU and the NUJ have been putting the BBC's "barking mad" plan to shed 2,500 experienced staff under detailed scrutiny.

They have discovered that lists of people earmarked for redundancy have already been drawn up, despite the temporary suspension of a trawl for "volunteers" – something that has caught lowly BBC managers by surprise, largely since the advanced hit list is in breach of all guidelines.

Some panicked managers are already intimidating staff by warning them that they are forbidden from taking action because their grade dictates that they should not go on strike in the event of a dispute. Other managers, meanwhile, are aware that a "multi-platform future" involving the video, audio and internet broadcasting of items will actually require far more trained staff than planned. As hacks try to learn new skills and are forced to seek expert advice from those very souls who are about to get the chop, they can expect to be told precisely where to go.

MANY and vocal have been the demands from both within and without the BBC that Mark Thompson should close down "yoof" channel BBC Three rather than countenance cuts to news and current affairs.

Today host John Humphrys pointed out that "only six men and a dog watch BBC Three", while his TV colleague John Sweeney bellowed his contempt for the channel, demanding that executives "stop cutting current affairs; it is bad for the soul".

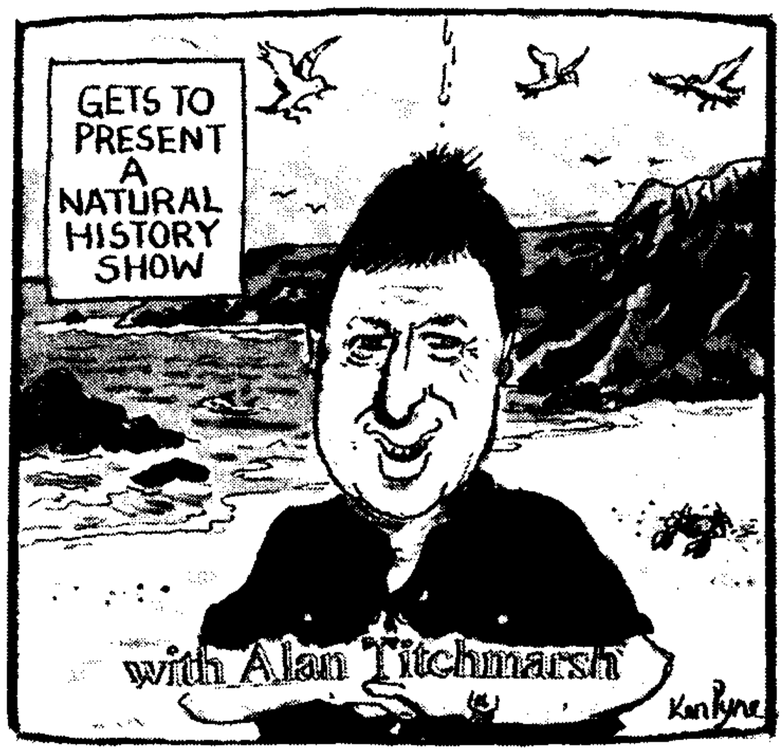
Quite right, too – for in the past three years alone the corporation's current affairs department, though it is curiously unwilling to boast of the fact, has been responsible for such treasures as *My Big Breasts and Me*, *How Dirty Can I Get?*, *Bust My Ass, Circumcise Me*, *Booze Bird, Help! I Smell of Fish* and that legendary Reithian quartet, *Fuck off I'm Fat/Ginger/Small/A Hairy Woman*, all of them broadcast on... BBC Three!

PS: One BBC Three alumnus who may well do nicely from the corporation's chaos is founding controller Stuart Murphy, who oversaw its £250m launch in 2003 and recruited Johnny Vaughan as the "face of the channel" – before parting company with him a year later after he was unable to pull in more than 30,000 viewers for his chat show. Murphy is currently a frontrunner to replace the royally displaced Peter Fincham as controller of BBC One.

GOING LIVE

WITH the BBC News helicopter hanging in the air waiting for King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to land at Heathrow, BBC News 24's Jon Sopel gushed that there were "pictures just in" of an aircraft landing.

Unfortunately there was a snag. "Actually that's an El-Al plane," Sopel added, referring to the Israeli carrier and not, presumably, King Abdullah's airline of choice.



JOINED-UP BBC

October: BBC director-general announces creation of "an integrated multi-media newsroom instead of largely separate TV, radio and web operations", in order to "significantly reduce duplication in newsgathering and production"

November: Head of BBC Five Live announces that in preparation for the move to Salford in three years, the network will stop using the news summaries produced by the Radio Newsroom and produce its own instead

"I believe that the drug dealers in this area are quite well organised"

IN AN interview with ITN newsreader Alastair Stewart last week, film-maker Michael Moore argued that Britain was more to blame than America for the Iraq war, as Tony Blair was an intelligent man whereas George Bush didn't really know what he was doing. "It's like giving the car keys to a drunk driver," Moore said.

Whoops! Four years ago Alastair Stewart incurred a £1,000 fine and a 30-month driving ban for drunkenly crashing his Mercedes while three times over the limit. His counsel explained to Basingstoke magistrates that the broadcaster had been using alcohol "to an enormous level" to cope with the pressure of hosting nightly news bulletins about, er, the Iraq war. Because of the conviction he lost his job as presenter of *Police, Camera, Action!*, a show about dangerous drivers.

Understandably embarrassed by Moore's analogy, and fearful that it would be seized on by the tabloids, Stewart had the line edited out of the interview before transmission.

DUMB BRITAIN

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which actress sang "Happy Birthday to you" to John F Kennedy?
Contestant: The Queen.
Anne Robinson: Who won the US Open Tennis Championship wearing a black dress modelled on Audrey Hepburn's in Breakfast at Tiffany's?
Contestant: Roger Federer.

Eggheads, BBC2

Dermot Murnaghan: The name of which percussion instrument literally means "wood sound" in Greek?
Contestant: Sorry, I haven't got a clue.
Murnaghan: Go on, have a guess. Percussion instrument.
Contestant: Flute?

100 YEARS AGO

"Shortly after ITV had gone on the air [in 1955] Britain launched its first nuclear submarine. ITN invited viewers to submit names for it and the Admiralty, at that time under the late Lord Mountbatten, agreed to choose one of them. However, Mountbatten had already made up his mind that it was going to be called Dreadnought and unfortunately nobody had sent that in. A viewer had to be invented."

– *Reginald Bosanquet*, Let's Get Through Wednesday: My 25 Years With ITN, *1980*

THE HUNTING OF THE SARK

SIR David and Sir Frederick Barclay, owners of the *Telegraph* and the *Spectator*, have added another title to their press empire.

A few weeks ago residents of the Channel Island of Sark found a scruffy publication called *Sark News* pushed through their doors. "This is a historical event," proclaimed the front-page editorial. "Now, for the first time in the 450 years of feudal rule on Sark, this island has an independent voice."

Not so: Sark has already had an independent newspaper for some years in the form of *La Vouaire de Sercq*, edited by a resident called Jennifer Cochrane. And the "independence" of this new rival is called into question by the note on the back: "Publisher: Brecqhou Developments. Editor: Mrs S. Oliver."

Brecqhou is of course the island fortress off the coast of Sark inhabited by the Barclay twins. But who is Mrs S. Oliver? "I have lived on Sark since 1975," Jennifer Cochrane tells the *Eye*, "and I have no idea who she is. She doesn't manifest herself. I imagine she must live on Brecqhou – if she exists."

If the purpose of the Barclays' new propaganda sheet was to win hearts and minds in Sark, it seems to have failed. To celebrate its first edition, *Sark News* invited every reader "to enjoy two free drinks of their choice at the Bel Air pub on presentation of this newspaper". Such is the hostility to the twins that so far only one reader has even attempted to take up the offer.

The islanders' wariness is understandable. Since the 16th century Sark has been divided into 40 parcels of land called *tenements* (pronounced French-style), and in recent weeks the twins have spent millions of pounds buying very long leases on at least five of the *tenements*, including one on which the Bel Air pub is sited. Most of the vendors are rich outsiders who bought the land for tax reasons, and who found the Barclays' lavish cheques too tempting to resist. Having acquired the leases, last week the twins bought the freehold of each site for the risible sum of £25,000.

Why the sudden burst of activity? On every freehold purchase the buyer has to pay a tax called a *treizieme* (one thirteenth of the price), whereas leasehold transactions are tax-free – for now. As part of the island's constitutional reforms, a new property transfer tax is currently awaiting royal consent at the Privy Council which will cover leases as well. It should have come into force ages ago but has been delayed by legal challenges and petitions to the Queen from the twins. By buying up the *tenements* before the tax is introduced, and cunningly shifting almost all of the purchase price on to the lease rather than the freehold, they have lawfully avoided handing over large sums to the island's exchequer. In Cochrane's opinion: "Sark is being cheated of income."

Sark News promises to "speak out against undemocratic and unfair practices without any fear of intimidation [or] harassment" – claiming that this is what has traditionally happened to anyone who dares criticise the *seigneur*. But with the *seigneur*'s powers waning away under the island's new constitutional reforms, a likelier source of harassment is the Barclays themselves. As many national newspapers and the BBC have found, it is hard to mention the twins without receiving a threatening missive from their lawyers.

As owner of Brecqhou, Sir David Barclay has for many years been entitled to a seat in Chief Pleas, the Sark parliament, but he has never bothered to turn up. Had he attended last month's meeting he would have heard furious denunciations of both the Barclays and the *tenement* owners who assisted their land grab. "The perpetrators should be ostracised by us and shown for what they are," thundered Deputy Richard Drewe. "They are abusing their position… We the public should shun them at every opportunity."

Curiously, despite its promise to report without fear or favour, the new issue of *Sark News* hasn't found space for these and similar comments.

I-SKY

"Just spent the half-term week in Tenerife… the only disappointment was that there was no broadband or Sky TV in the villa. Both are available on the island but not in Gaunty Towers. It's only when you are deprived of the cutting-edge and immediate news of Sky, and are forced to watch the BBC, that you realise just how good Eamonn Holmes and Sky is for breaking news."

– *Column by Jon Gaunt in* Sun *(prop. R. Murdoch) on Sky (prop. R. Murdoch)*

MODESTY BLAZE

● "I am not in the least bit surprised by the news that Duncan Fletcher has directed a stream of invective at me in his new book. He knows he won't sell many copies without mentioning the big names of English cricket." – **Geoffrey Boycott, *Daily Telegraph*.**

AD NAUSEAM

AS retailers gear up for Christmas, the best idea most ad agencies have been able to come up with is to pay celebrities fat wads of cash to endorse shops they never use. Close observers of the advertising world will have noted that this is much like last year… and the year before that.

Worst of the lot is Morrison's, whose Christmas ads, as yet unaired, feature Denise Van Outen and Diarmuid Gavin and were shot in Tunbridge Wells. Children from the local theatre school were drafted in as extras in a humdrum tableau replete with fake snow.

Amid all the festive flummery, the ad of course makes no mention of the fact that Morrison's closed its Tunbridge Wells Vale Road store on October 28 last year with the loss of 116 jobs. Locals will no doubt find the ad's tagline, "Fresh Choice for You", a little stale. Happy Christmas everybody!

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

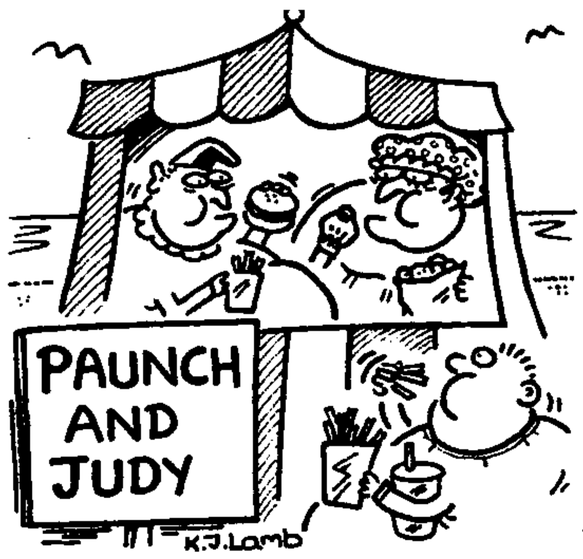
GAP
DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING FOR A 5 YEAR OLD?
YES. WE CAN OFFER FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT WITH LONG HOURS, NO PAY, AND LOTS OF PUNISHMENT!
WHIP!
MEANWHILE... TOPSHOP
GAP USING CHILD LABOUR
IT'S ABSOLUTELY DISGUSTING!!!
THEY'RE STEALING OUR IDEAS!!!

MEDICINE BALLS

Moneybags GPs

ARE GPs worth it? The announcement that average gross annual pay had risen to £110,000 sparked another round of Whitehall-inspired media vitriol, but the performance-related contract that GPs are bound to was negotiated and agreed with the Department of Health, Downing Street and the Treasury.

Gordon Brown and Tony Blair had at least two opportunities to veto the deal if they felt it was too generous. GP negotiators spent a day explaining that many GPs would "over-perform", because they were already managing chronic diseases better than the new contract stipulated. So why did we need it at all?



Blair and Brown believed that the money was worth paying to control GPs. Thatcher first voiced concerns that she had no idea what GPs did with their time and in 1991 introduced a contract that required partners to do 26 hours of consulting a week over 42 weeks of the year, with performance targets for vaccinations, cervical smears and ill-thought out elderly screening. Concern about the variability in treating chronic conditions such as heart disease and diabetes, and the rise of evidence-based medicine, triggered Labour's new contract. The aim was to ensure all GPs managed these diseases to an agreed standard, in the hope that those who weren't would be motivated by financial gain.

Many GPs find the notion of performance related pay distasteful – why do doctors need to be "induced" to do what's best for their patients? – but saw the contract as a way of correcting the previous 15 years (when governments undercut their pay review recommendations) and improving recruitment. Many jumped at the chance at not having to organise out-of-hours care. This was only ever meant to be for emergencies but had become "24-hour access to a GP", with demand up tenfold over 20 years. Many GPs still do out-of-hours care, but since 2004 it's been the primary care trust's job to finance and organise it, with predictably disastrous results.

So what are patients getting for their money? The new GP contract was never subject to a controlled trial but an average practice is now offering 6,000 more consultations a year with twice as many well controlled diabetic patients and 30 percent more controlled hypertensives. There are several thousand fewer strokes and heart attacks each year. We're living longer than ever but are less happy and satisfied, partly because we don't like being on the ten tablets a day that are keeping us alive.

For a price, the new GP contract has controlled GPs who are in turn controlling patients with a mass medicalisation programme that seems to be reducing the incidence of nasty disease "events". £110,000 a year works out at £60 an hour before deductions, which hardly seems exorbitant. The cost to the NHS every time a patient sees a GP is about £24, compared to nearly £30 for NHS-Direct and more than £37 for walk-in centres.

By chipping away at the morale of "moneybags GPs", it's hard to see what the government hopes to achieve. Its entire reform programme involves keeping GPs on-side to commission good value services where the PCT has failed and take some of the workload from hospitals. Lord Darzi's London reforms will mean a "77 percent increase in GP consultations over the next 10 years or the whole system will be paralysed". For GPs to take on this extra work and extend their opening hours (without breeching EU law), it needs not only more GPs but receptionists, phlebotomists, health care assistants, practice nurses, district nurses, pathology and X-ray facilities and access to social services. That's expensive; but not nearly as expensive as a district general hospital. Especially if you close it. Brown has some tough choices ahead in the age of change…

M.D.

MILLER'S TALE

ONE of the most important tasks of health information company Dr Foster Intelligence is to monitor the performance of Independent Sector Treatment Centres, especially since a parliamentary committee recently declared there was still insufficient evidence to judge them.

Dr Foster was awarded the ISTC "informatics" contract in June, following a selection process run by the Department of Health's commercial directorate – the same directorate that was heavily criticised by the public accounts committee for its role in creating Dr Foster, a public-private company, through a "back room" deal which had the taxpayer paying over the odds for a 50 percent stake.

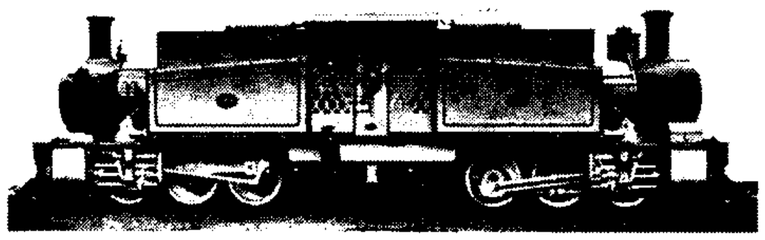
The man responsible for awarding that contract was the head of the directorate's central contracts management unit, one David Miller. Amazingly, Miller has now turned up as Dr Foster' chief information officer, where he joins fellow commercial-directorate old boy Geoff Searle – the very man who pushed through the ISTC programme in the first place (*Eye* 1190).

Civil service rules would normally prevent government officials working for companies to which they have just awarded a big contract. But, as the *Eye* recently showed, the DoH's commercial directorate is staffed by hundreds of "contractors" paid (very large) consultants' fees, to whom the rules don't apply.

What chance now of an objective assessment of ISTCs, one of the most controversial health privatisation policies?

4. Keep your home warm
If you can, keep a temperature of 21OC (700F) in all the rooms you use during the day.

NHS advertisement



SIGNAL FAILURES

Cross words

THE boss of Crossrail, the £16bn plan to link east and west London, certainly has form on major projects. An inquiry into cock-ups at a new airport in Hong Kong pointed the finger at Douglas Oakervee for the disastrous impact of his "poor project management" and "overbearing personality".

Oakervee, now Crossrail's chair, headed the Hong Kong airports project division until 1998 and was in post during the chaotic opening of the Chek Lap Kok airport. Failures included lost luggage, unconnected telephones, lengthy flight delays and security lapses. A Hong Kong Legislative Council inquiry said Oakervee had "failed in his job as project director" and "cannot escape responsibility" for much of the chaos. The breakdown of the cargo handling system was estimated to have knocked a third of a percent off Hong Kong's GDP.

Ominously for Crossrail, legislators singled out his responsibility for the project's late completion and attacked him for an apparent willingness to mislead the airport authority board. He "frequently provided vague, inaccurate and misleading information, to put forward an optimistic picture to discourage too close probing", they said, adding: "The select committee was astonished at the small regard he seemed to have about having misled the AA board."

Oakervee labours at Crossrail alongside another veteran of the Hong Kong cock-up: its director of corporate affairs, Clinton Leeks, was spin-doctor for the Hong Kong airport and drew criticism in the press for his sunny statements prior to the chaotic opening. Crossrail declined to comment.

GORDON BROWN wants to waste more public money on his dream of a privatised tube. Transport for London expects to pick up the pieces of Brown's previous underground disaster, the collapsed Metronet consortium, but the Financial Times says the government is unhappy with TfL's proposed control over maintenance and wants private firms more involved to keep "tight control of costs".

Tightly controlling costs is precisely what private firms didn't do through Metronet. Setting up another costly public-private deal will simply delay tube renewal again and create scope for new arguments over who pays for what.

Such conflict is rife on the mainline rail network, where each delay is attributed to Network Rail or a train operator so fines and compensation are calculated correctly. Managers check the data and query delays they don't think should be attributed to them. Each query triggers further investigation. First Great Western challenged NR 3,800 times over 12 months. It is entitled to do so, especially when NR can't or won't sort out the infrastructure, because privatisation was founded on clashing financial interests.

THE rail industry spends millions meeting disabled-access rules, but that doesn't guarantee a smooth ride for wheelchair users.

Southeastern is spending £5m at stations (dropped kerbs, wheelchair-friendly ticket counters, etc) to get its disability boxes ticked. "The aim… is to ensure that no disabled person is denied access to our service," says MD Charles Horton. "There will be no reduction in the standards of accessibility."

But an Eye reader who is paralysed from the waist down has found the opposite at London Bridge station, where staff always promptly used to fetch him a platform-to-train ramp. Now they tell him to ask for the ramp at the office at the end of the platform, although the extra effort to get there in his unpowered wheelchair can be painful.

After Southeastern apologised in writing, on 26 October two employees at London Bridge told him, without explanation, to wait for the next train but one. He says there was time before the first train for one of them to fetch the ramp. Passengers on board made space for him. Humiliated at not being able to board, he grabbed one of the doors as it was about to shut. He says an employee pulled him away from the train and told him to await the police.

Passengers helped him on to the next train and off at Charing Cross (without ramps). One who witnessed the incident advised him to take legal action and volunteered to give evidence. "It's a combination of rude members of staff and bad management," says the reader. "Their overriding intention is to get the trains to move on time, regardless of who is on them or not."

So much for Southeastern's website claim about "disability awareness training" that ensures "all our passenger facing staff have the necessary skills to provide a high service standard".

'Dr B Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

BASILDON BUND

FROM ESSEX, an example of how businesses are exploiting a loophole in environmental protection laws to dump millions of tonnes of rubble on greenbelt land under the guise of developing golf courses.

Contractors wishing to tip waste are normally liable for landfill tax, but if that material is for the construction of "recreational facilities" it can be dumped tax-free – in fact, at a handy profit of around £100 a load. Recent years have witnessed a sudden enthusiasm for "re-landscaping" golf courses up and down Britain to incorporate mounds, hills and "bunds" where none existed.

Two years ago Tory Basildon council signed an agreement to grant a 99-year lease on the council's popular, leafy, municipal course to Jack Barker Golf Ltd of Milton Keynes. A rival bid from a consortium formed by the club's members was cold-shouldered. In September this year the council's development control committee approved a Barker scheme to "develop" the course which will involve the loss of up to 500 trees and the importation of 120,000 cubic metres of "inert material" to be delivered by 56 lorries a day over 18 months. "Bunds" more than 20ft high will be created to screen a driving range. Locals fear significant dust nuisance and damage to the landscape and wildlife.

Jack Barker Golf specializes in cheap 'n' cheerful "pay and play" courses, their motto being "no yobs, no snobs". Nothing wrong with that, but locals are not impressed by the company's record elsewhere. At Wavendon in **Milton Keynes** Barkers had to withdraw an application similar to the Basildon one after planners said it should be "treated as a waste disposal application rather than... minor engineering". Barkers has since submitted an application to build more than 600 houses on a nine-hole course there. Barkers was refused planning permission to similarly "re-structure" a golf course at Rother Valley (**Sheffield**). Meanwhile at Little Horwood, near **Buckingham**, church bells rang in celebration in 2005 when councillors rejected Barkers' plans for a new golf course which happened to involve dumping more than a million tonnes of waste over three years.

Elsewhere, councillors seem able to recognise a mountain of rubbish when they see one. But not apparently in Essex.

● RESIDENTS of a newly-built street in the village of Morda, near Oswestry, Shropshire, are happy with their new houses, apart from one little thing. Oswestry borough council has named the road Cae Onan. "Cae" is Welsh for "meadow" or "field", but "Onan" has no meaning in the language. It was, of course, the name of the chap in Genesis (38:7-10) who came to a sticky end after angering God by "spilling his seed" in preference to impregnating his late brother's wife as instructed. Sniggering locals are now referring to the address as "Wankers' Meadow". The council, which perhaps intended to call the street "Cae Onnen" (Ash Meadow), claims it would be too much bother to change the name now. What a bunch of *halwyr!*

WIGHT, YOU'RE FIRED

HEADS are rolling on the Isle of Wight as the Undercliff Drive scandal inquiry (*Eyes passim*) delivers its verdicts.

Deputy chief executive and former head of legal services John Lawson has been booted out for "serious misconduct" on the recommendation of the independent investigator. Stewart Dobson's 27-page report details a catalogue of failure by Lawson over the illegal contract arrangements with engineering consultants High-Point Rendel (H-PR). Cllr George Brown, chairman of the investigating committee, said: "Mr Lawson's conduct fell well below the standard... [expected] from one of the authority's most senior officers." Lawson responded by describing the inquiry as a "witch-hunt".

Cannier in his reaction was council finance chief Paul Wilkinson. Despite also being found guilty of serious misconduct over the £13m project, he managed to relieve taxpayers of an extra £86,000 before handing back the keys to the safe. The brass-necked beancounter refused to resign, which would have netted him a legal entitlement of a piddling £26,670, insisting instead on an "early retirement" option worth an additional £59,146.

Meanwhile, H-PR's old pal from Scarborough days, Derek "Irritable" Rowell, "strategic director for economic development and regeneration", has resigned, trousering nearly £22,000 in lieu of notice. He has fled north, vowing never to return.

POOL SHOW

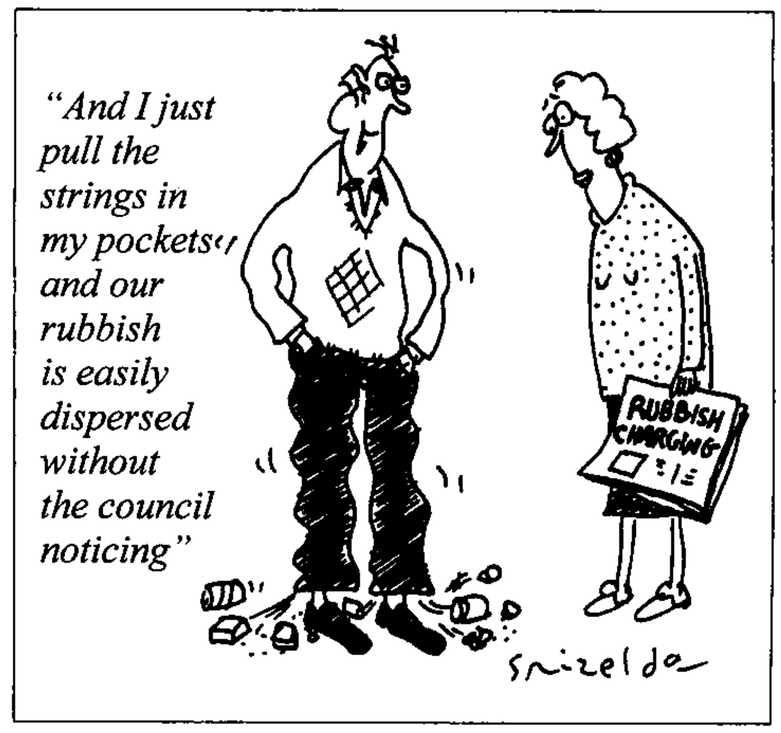
TWO YEARS ago Graham Farrant was appointed chief executive of Leisure Connection (LC), a company specialising in running local authority leisure centres which has attracted flak because of poor hygiene at many of its swimming pools (*Eyes* passim).

New broom Farrant – 2002 winner, as chief executive of Barking and Dagenham council, of Rotten Boroughs' blue-sky thinking award – was brought in to help LC clean up its act. So how's it going?

In February this year **Easington** district council issued its second warning to LC about the Seaham Leisure Centre after it was found that half the vending machines were out of order, carpets were unclean, ashtrays full and the kitchens "deplorable".

The following month **Lambeth** scrapped its contract with LC after Streatham leisure centre was found to be filthy, with mould on the walls and ageing equipment.

In April, **Castle Morpeth** borough council received a report from independent consultants on the state of its contract with LC who run two


"And I just pull the strings in my pockets and our rubbish is easily dispersed without the council noticing"
RUBBISH CHARGING
£1£
Snizelda

of the council's leisure centres. Maintenance, cleanliness and housekeeping were all found to be "poor", basic faults were rectified "painfully slow" and it was noted that there had been a shortfall in investment over three years.

In August swimmers in **Grantham** complained that they were fed up with dirty facilities, which included excrement and used nappies regularly found on the floors of changing rooms.

In September **Oadby and Wigston** borough council in Leicestershire fined LC £2,500 for its failure properly to clean two leisure centres it managed.

In July LC was put up for sale for £50m. To date there have been no takers. Swim, anyone?

●LEEDS is the latest city to suffer the embarrassment of spending millions on a "flagship" new swimming pool – only to be plagued by expensive last-minute problems. The £16m John Charles Aquatic Centre opened last week, replacing the brutalist Westgate "international" pool designed in the Sixties by corrupt architect John Poulson. The new pool, by architects William Saunders, features an "innovative" (uh-oh) diving pool with a floor that goes up and down. Alas, this disintegrated two days before the official opening, so there will be no diving at the John Charles for many months. And problems with mechanical booms meant to divide the main pool mean that it's only open for half its 50m length. Come back Poulson, all is forgiven!

CURRYING FAVOUR

LAST MONTH this column observed that "fixed allowances for councillors, introduced by the Labour government, have proved a godsend for the lazy" (*Eye* 1195). We reported that more than half of Hartlepool's Labour members failed to drag themselves down to the council chamber for more than 50 percent of meetings, while still happily trousering their full allowances.

In the interests of balance we can report that Tories are just as happy to take the money and not turn up. At Reigate and Banstead council in Surrey, 15 out of 41 ruling Tories failed to attend the first full council meeting since the summer break, prompting their leader, Andrew Mountney, to declare that if they couldn't be arsed to attend council meetings (there are only seven full ones per year), they should "consider their position".

One of the chief slackers at Reigate is Cllr John Jones, who has only attended four of the last eight council meetings. But then the ex-copper, who is married to former Tory MP Edwina Currie (who fondly refers to him as "JJ") is also "a media personality in his own right", juggling his political activities with appearances on important television programmes such as *Celebrity Wife Swap*.

●PROBLEM: Bicycles being stolen from outside shopping centre in Basingstoke.
Solution: Install CCTV to monitor bike rack.
Next problem: Camera positioned so view of bike rack obscured by tree.
Commonsense solution: Move camera.
Basingstoke council solution: Chop down tree.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

WE REALISE THAT IN THESE TROUBLED TIMES EMOTIONS CAN RUN HIGH...
THAT PEOPLE SAY AND DO THINGS THEY REGRET, WHICH IS WHY WE SUGGEST PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLING...
I DON'T WANT PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLING... I JUST WANT SOMEONE TO SEW MR SQUIDGY'S EYE BACK ON!

NOOKS and CORNERS

BATH continues to seethe over the proposed extension to the Holburne Museum in Sydney Gardens (Eyes passim).

After the surprise rejection of his obtrusive proposed extension by Bath & North East Somerset Council (against officer advice), Eric Parry has come back with a slightly smaller design, this time clad in beige ceramic rather than "cobalt blue" – a colour which "design guru" Stephen Bayley, consultant to the council, assures us is the colour of Bath stone.

Geoff Webber, the council's "Senior Professional – Major Developments", is determined this scheme will go ahead and has arranged a "technical briefing" for members of the development control committee to make sure the recalcitrant councillors don't misbehave by ignoring his advice this time. No debate is to be tolerated at the meeting and no opponent of the proposal will be allowed to speak.

Meanwhile local architect Martin Farrell of Farrell & Co (no relation to Sir Terry), has also submitted a scheme for enlarging the Holburne. This envisages small extensions to the rear and an extension into Sydney Gardens which is only single storey. It achieves the same amount of accommodation as the Parry scheme by going underground (as at the Louvre) yet seems to come out cheaper. Needless to say it would be faced in Bath stone and is Classical in style.

Parry's allies are presenting the rival designs as Neo-Georgian *versus* Modern, reactionary v. progressive, stuffy bourgeois v. enlightened forward-looking, etc. But this is not the point. Perhaps Parry's design needn't be so big and ill-mannered; perhaps it could still be a modern conception and yet faced in Bath's traditional building material. And perhaps the great and good of Bath might be less arrogant and contemptuous of the views of its citizens.

IN KENT, meanwhile, Maidstone Museum is also to receive money from the Heritage Lottery Fund to pay for a controversial extension.

The museum, together with the Bentlif Art Gallery, has been going since 1857 and is very popular. The building is listed grade II*, and at its core is Chillington Manor, an Elizabethan house which was extended several times in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

These extensions use the same materials – red brick and timber – and the same style, although are clearly of their time. But the proposed new extensions to the east wing are deliberately discordant in materials and manner. One part fills in a corner between two red-brick gabled bays with a rectilinear block raised up above glass on* pilotis *– stilts to you. It is to be clad in overlapping "metal shingle" made of a copper and gold alloy.

Using the tired old rhetoric of modernism with its naïve belief in the* Zeitgeist *rather than working with the past creatively, Gianluca Rendina, a director of Hugh Broughton Architects who won the job in competition, claims: "The nature of the building is eclectic and it has developed and evolved over time. There is a major contrast between the Tudor and Victorian styles. We thought it made sense to add a 21st century style to the mix."

As always in these cases, the protagonists use* clichés *rather than their eyes. "It is a modern, bold, eye-catching design," insists Mr Broughton. "There is a desire to look to the future as well as the past"; while Simon Lace, museum "manager", explains: "We wanted something eye-catching. Museums are about the future as much as the past."

It's no good my complaining about such architectural posturing: the design has secured planning permission and listed building consent as well as funding. But as the chairman of Maidstone's planning committee, Cllr Richard Lusty, complained of the design: "It reminds me of the exterior of the Golden Mile in Blackpool!"

THEN there is Abingdon, eight miles south of Oxford, where the museum is upstairs in the Sessions Hall in the old Town Hall. This is a splendid building, built in 1678-82 by Christopher Kempster, one of Wren's City masons. Celia Fiennes thought it the finest town hall in England.

Like many ancient town halls and market halls, it is raised up on open arches, so markets or meetings can take place underneath. Of course this is inconvenient for the 21st century visitor who is likely to be morbidly obese and unable to climb the stairs. So the council proposes to tack on a glass lift tower to the outside of this most lovely building, rising even further to the second floor. As ever there is the insistence on disabled access.

In addition, the curator Lauren Gilmour insists that the space within the open arcades is "dark and dismal", so it is proposed to glaze in the arches. This is on the naïve assumption held by architects that glass is invisible. It isn't: it reflects, while it also has to be fixed to the old masonry.

All this nonsense will cost £5m. Despite the usual fatuous clichés – "We want a living building not a closed, empty monument," says Julie Mayhew-Archer, chairman of the museum management committee – the building happens to be listed grade I and English Heritage rightly dislikes glazing in the arcades. The scheme is as gratuitous as it is Philistine, and makes Eric Parry's proposals for the Holburne seem a model of tact and sanity. Why not just leave the Town Hall alone?

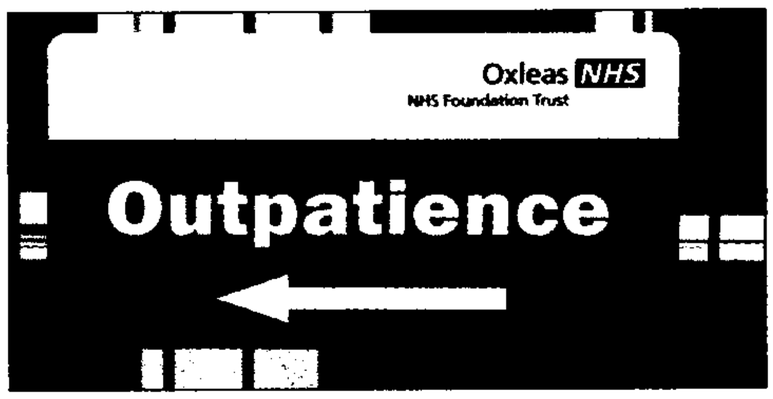
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Will we see the predictable philistine outrage about the Turner Prize exhibition this year?
TURNER 2007 IN PICTURES
J.D.
Do bears shit in the woods?
"SLEEPER"-MARK WALLINGER

I-SPY *S.E. London*



Submitted by Dr A. Bamji. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

Those Reunited Spice Girls

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THERE is a sad little story circulating widely in the music business concerning the apparent unworldliness of big-league conductors when it comes to arranging their love-life via the internet and managing to press the right keys on their computers.

Not so long ago the American maestro Leonard Slatkin suffered excruciating embarrassment when emails passed into the wrong hands revealing not only that that he was having an extra-marital affair with the dour Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie, but that their passion had been expressed in hi-tech metaphor: "I'd like to slot my modem in your lap-top" being, as it were, the thrust of the exchanges.

Now, much the same has happened to Charles Dutoit, the eminent former maestro of the Montreal Symphony who is soon to take over both the Philadelphia and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras. Born in 1936 but still obviously game, as conductors tend to be, he sent an email to a certain, younger lady with arrangements for a clandestine meeting in a hotel on the other side the world. She was to pick up the key, go to the room and wait for him, with strict instructions that (as the email said) "I WANT TO FIND YOU NAKED when I arrive".

Unfortunately poor Dutoit sent these instructions not only to the lady but to everyone else in his address book, including agents, artists, concert promoters throughout the world and, alas, his wife.

Perhaps it was jet-lag. And if it was, this sorry tale is evidence stronger even than the size of their carbon footprints that top musicians spend too much time in transit.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

A survey of the Leeds Community Drugs Service undertaken by users rated their overall satisfaction with the service as high.

Yorkshire Post

Letters

Mayor culpa?

Sir,

It really is not acceptable for Ratbiter to continue to smear Yusuf al-Qaradawi as the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is true that in his youth Sheikh Qaradawi was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and active in opposing the then Egyptian military dictatorship. But many decades have passed since Qaradawi left the Brotherhood, and since then he has become the leading progressive Muslim theologian with a mass following making the case for Muslims to actively engage with the West and its values. Indeed, he is generally acknowledged to be the most influential Muslim scholar in the world today.

It is simply untrue to claim that Qaradawi advocates killing homosexuals when, at the conference he attended at City Hall in 2004, in answer to press questions, he denied this and urged British Muslims to respect the rights of homosexuals. He repeated those same views later that day on Newsnight. Ratbiter should tell his readers that the source for his attacks on Qaradawi is the discredited Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), which was set up and is run by a former senior Israeli army intelligence officer and selectively translates and quotes the views of Dr Qaradawi and other Muslim leaders in a way which tends to discredit them, given that most people using MEMRI's material do not speak Arabic.

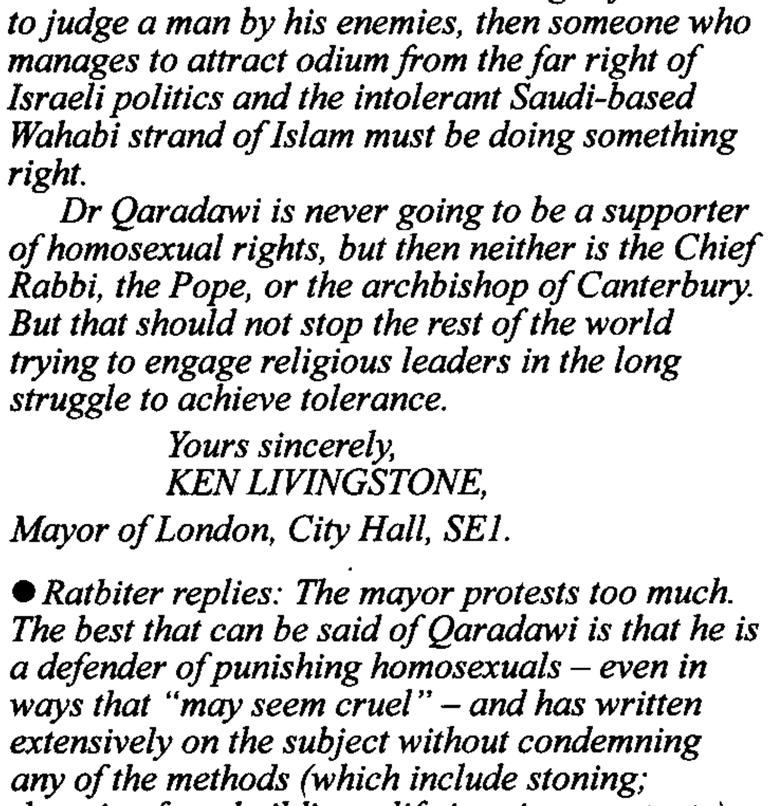
Dr Qaradawi called on Muslims around the world to donate blood for victims of 9/11 and condemned the London tube bombings. If we are to judge a man by his enemies, then someone who manages to attract odium from the far right of Israeli politics and the intolerant Saudi-based Wahabi strand of Islam must be doing something right.

Dr Qaradawi is never going to be a supporter of homosexual rights, but then neither is the Chief Rabbi, the Pope, or the archbishop of Canterbury. But that should not stop the rest of the world trying to engage religious leaders in the long struggle to achieve tolerance.

Yours sincerely,
KEN LIVINGSTONE,

Mayor of London, City Hall, SE1.

● *Ratbiter replies: The mayor protests too much. The best that can be said of Qaradawi is that he is a defender of punishing homosexuals – even in ways that "may seem cruel" – and has written extensively on the subject without condemning any of the methods (which include stoning; throwing from buildings; life imprisonment, etc). For more enlightened Qaradawi fatwas visit www.islamonline.net – not, so far as we know, a website run by ex-Israeli intelligence officers.*



Old nag

Sir,

Occasionally the In The Back editorial team get it wrong. Take the report "Break horse power?", which begins: "No one expects car manufacturers to be eco-friendly. But the German giant BMW has just excelled itself by defeating two small charities..."

Just who are these small charities who give their last widow's mite to help the poor and the disabled? Er, well actually one is the British Horse Association, a pressure group of rich horse owners whose sole concern is to maintain their pre-motoring right to ride over other people's land spreading horse manure.

So, on the one side we have a multi-national company which has "agreed to provide an alternative route for pedestrians and cyclists", a county council anxious to create jobs, and the courts applying the law. On the other side we have a bunch of toffs with horses. Are you sure you have backed the right horse on this one?

Yours faithfully,
PETER HINES,

Via email.

Lookalike

Penfold

Governor

Sir,

I wonder if anyone has noticed the striking similarity between the Governor of the Bank of England and the one-time sidekick of DangerMouse, Penfold? Are they by any chance related?

I think etc. etc...
DAVID A. SCOTT,

Canterbury.

Another fine mess

Sir,

Am I alone in considering Piloti's glee at fines of £25,000 and £20,000 against an architect and contractor for flouting listed building legislation woefully naive? Does anyone really think that such sums are not treated as mere business expenses to be included in the final bill to the client?

Vandalism in other forms frequently leads to jail sentences – why not in this form too?

Regards,
NIGEL SMITH,

London SE1.

Own goal

Sir,

Further to your Street of Shame piece in Eye 1195 about Alisher Usmanov and the sporting press, could I just mention that Matt Scott works for the Guardian, not the Mirror, and he did make clear in his piece that Usmanov had paid for the press trip to Moscow.

Best wishes,
BEN CLISSITT,

Sports Editor, The Guardian, EC1.

● *The Mirror hack in question (who didn't declare Usmanov's payment) was Martin Lipton. Apologies for the editing error.*

Scenes You Seldom See

"If we leave now we could get up early tomorrow morning and go to church"

Beeb raver

Sir,

I have to say it was absolutely unacceptable of you to devote two whole pages of your organ to tales of incompetent, wasteful and overpaid BBC senior managers. There is enough material to have filled the whole bloody magazine.

Yours,
NICK SERPELL,

National Union of Journalists, BBC Television Centre, W12.

Grin up north

Sir,

I was fascinated to read the comments of "One BBC programme maker" (Eye TV – Eye 1196) with regard to the rumoured closure of BBC Television Centre and the "cost of shipping artists by plane up north" should programmes currently made at TVC be moved, in the future, to the new site in Salford. This is assuming that all "artists" do in fact live in London and need to be transported elsewhere to appear on television. When the proposed move of the sports department to Salford takes place, the BBC can save the cost of shipping by plane Match of the Day pundits Alan Shearer, Mark Lawrence (sic) and Alan Hansen down south. It works both ways. In common with several BBC employees in London, the programme-maker in question would benefit from a relocation.

ASHLEY BORODA,

Manchester.

Flower power

Sir,

Was it really fair to include in Pseuds' Corner (Eye 1194) the description by Juliette "Load of Tosh" Binoche of giving birth (the vase-of-beautiful-flowers thingie)? I thought it was really quite sweet, and I can't stand the woman. Mind you, given that my local equivalent would be Britney Spears' "I'm, like, epidural, please!", my standards may be slipping.

Yours faithfully,
CATHERINE ATHERTON,

Departments of Philosophy and Classics, UCLA, California.

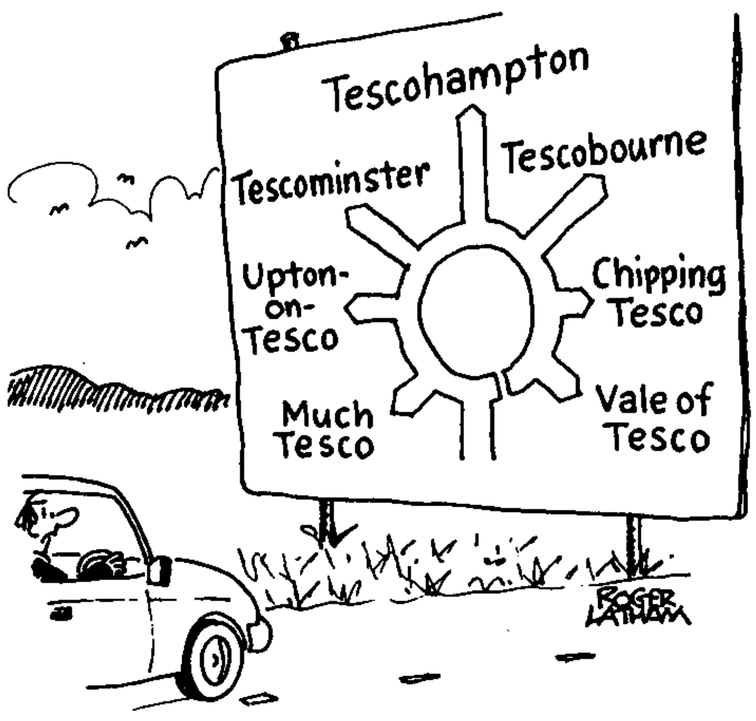
Anagram

Sir,

Heather Mills-McCartney = MEN? I'LL MARRY THE CASH ETC.

Yours,
TIM HOPKINS,

Luton, Beds.



Constable country

Sir,

Your Ad Nauseam writer (Eye 1196) links the Met's strapline for recruiting Special Constables, "I didn't want to be somebody who stood by and did nothing", to the failure by two PCSOs to rescue a drowning boy in Wigan.

Firstly, Sir Ian Knacker's lot don't police the Wigan area (as any fule kno).

Secondly, a "Special" is a police officer, but unpaid (known in the trade as "hobby bobbies"); a PCSO is someone paid to look like a police officer, but without any police powers worth mentioning.

Special Constables provide valuable (albeit limited) support to their full-time colleagues. I have yet to discern any worthwhile function in PCSOs, other than (in true Blair/Brown tradition) to make fewer police numbers actually appear to be more. The boys in blue are fair game on some occasions, but this was below the utility belt, shurely?

Yours,
COLIN "DUNCOPPIN"
MACDONALD (EX-KNACKER),
Nottingham.

Suck on this

Sir,

Your comment about Cadbury's move to Poland (Eye 1196) was pure Private Eye humbug, if you'll permit me to say so. If British workers don't wake up to the facts of life, such as the fatuity of the shorter working week and automatic annual pay increases, then more and more jobs will be exported to deserving countries that have kept a sense of balance between wages and prices.

Workers of the world, unite! The days of lager-louting in Eye-beetha are at an end! The Fellowship of Man has re-asserted itself. The feather-bed has been abolished. Watch out, Bourneville bourgeois! Watch out, Peter Jones "partners"! Make way for the wonder of the age, the Polish Plumber!

Yours fraternally,
J.L.A. HARTLEY,
London W8.

SOLUTIONS

"Pauline de Dulin Designer Napkin Rings: bespoke, individual dining Solutions" – *napkin rings*

"Yorkshire Bank Financial Solutions Centre" – *meeting room*

"Amy Baertschi offers nutrition support and healthy eating solutions" – *diet advice*

"Power Church International, a place of Divine Solution" – *church*

"Signature Solutions for First Choice" – *airline meals*

All submitted by readers

"I thought it said 'Dominatrix'!"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"About this time, King Abdullah is getting an official reception, and a little bit of heckling, from the Queen..."
STEVE WRIGHT, Radio Two
(Frank Naylor)

"It's not great on the eyes, but it's super to watch..."
STEVE CLARIDGE, Radio 5 Live
(Fifty Watts of Power)

"Diouf is a master of the dark art of the winger: draws you in, sucks you off..."
GARRY BIRTLES, Sky Sports 1
(Ben Mousley)

"If anybody thinks that Juande Ramos can walk in the door at Spurs and do a King Cnut act and turn everything into gold, they are wrong."
GRAHAM HUNTER, Sky Sports New
(Tom Beaty)

Deathbed humour

Sir,

I have recently heard that it is entirely possible that nursing staff, as opposed to the clinical team, may in future be empowered to decide whether or not a patient should be resuscitated, and possibly given the say as to whether a DNR note should be placed on their files.

Would these nurses be of the same calibre as those in the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Health Authority, disaster area of the latest C. Diff. scandal, who told their patients to defecate in their beds because they did not have time to take them to the toilet or fetch them a bedpan?

GAIL EVERETT,
Via email.

Useful exercise

Sir,

There is indeed a pool at Headley Court (Letters, issue 1196), but it was designed for hydrotherapy, for one-to-one sessions between patient and physio in shallow, warm water and it provides an essential part of the rehabilitation process. However, the wounded also need to swim and do load-bearing exercises to build up muscles and the heart and lungs. The hydro pool was not designed for this. The current number of amputations has increased the need for a swimming pool and the wounded are using the public pool in Leatherhead, where they have a single lane.

We at Help for Heroes simply want to show our appreciation for our servicemen and women by raising funds to provide Headley Court with its own pool and gym complex that will further enhance the centre and ensure the wounded get the very best treatment.

ROGER MORGAN-GRENVILLE,
Head of fundraising, Help for Heroes.

Notes & Queries

Re Darling's advice to Northern Wreck depositors – "Don't panic". Reminiscent surely of Corporal Jones, not Captain Mainwaring. Nevertheless, Mainwaring's famous phrase "You stupid boy" might have been fitting.

PHIL HARVEY.

In reply to Graham Smith (Doctor Who are you kidding? Eye 1196), it is a matter of record that the Master was inspired not by the Sheriff of Nottingham, but by Sherlock Holmes's nemesis, Professor Moriarty. However, a Time Lord link between the two shows indubitably does exist. The second Doctor Who, Patrick Troughton, first shot to fame in 1953 as the first actor ever to play Robin Hood on British television. Can I have my anorak in Lincoln green please?

COLIN BOND.

Surely the Ant & Dec "Phone-In" controversy should be referred to as "Gallowgate-gate"?

DARYL BAMONTE.

I feel compelled to highlight an inaccuracy in the Putin-Kronsteen Lookalike (Eye 1196). It is in the novel "From Russia with Love" that Colonel Tov Kronsteen is the Planning Department Head for SMERSH and a Russian Grandmaster. In the film version, however, Kronsteen (played by Vladek Sheybal) is actually a Czech Grandmaster who is an agent of S.P.E.C.T.R.E, not of SMERSH.

MIKE EMERY.

Your list of flawed leaders of the Liberals over the past 40 years (Number Crunching, 1196) omitted Paddy (now Lord) Pantsdown and his extended fornication with his secretary. I appreciate that adultery is no longer considered much of a sin when compared to conspiracy to murder (Thorpe), drunkenness (Kennedy) and the unacceptable crime of being old (Campbell), but this pious voter will continue to ignore the Liberals until they can find a figure-head free of such character weaknesses.

STEPHEN WILSON.

Letter from **Kampala**
from Our Own Correspondent

HOW appropriate that the main watering hole for the Commonwealth circus that arrives in Uganda later this month for the biennial summit is the newly refurbished Serena hotel, once called Nile Mansions.

During the second reign of our ruthless prime minister, the late Milton Obote, Nile Mansions was an interrogation and torture centre. Its multi-million facelift makes no recognition of this grim history – not even a plaque. But who wants to be reminded of past horrors?

Certainly not the 50-odd heads of government and ministers who'll be here. Some of us, for example, think Zimbabwe deserves a mention too; but it's been airbrushed out of Commonwealth history. There wasn't a single reference to the country in the official 2005 report to members; nor in the 2007 report, just issued by the outgoing Commonwealth secretary-general, Don McKinnon.

Zimbabwe, say the apologists, no longer qualifies for a place on the Commonwealth agenda since Robert Mugabe ended its membership four years ago. In that case, one asks, why did the Commonwealth keep South Africa on its list of concerns for so long given that Pretoria left in 1961? Because, say the apologists, apartheid was a crime against humanity everyone abhorred. The suggestion is that a Commonwealth denunciation of Mugabe would win no such unanimity and to raise the subject would lead to a split between the "old white" and "new black" Commonwealth.

How appropriate, then, that one candidate for McKinnon's job appears to share the view that the past should be recalled only selectively. Mohan Kaul is director of the Commonwealth Business Council (CBC), formed to "promote global trade and investment for shared prosperity". He's been in charge of the council since it was set up at the Edinburgh Commonwealth summit in 1997. His CV lists so many directorships and committees on which he serves, one wonders whether he's ever had time for a real job.

But missing from the two-page, single-spaced CV is any reference to Kaul as chairman of a PR and lobbying outfit he helped launch in 2003 called Africapractice.

The CBC had a 50 percent stake in this joint venture, with the council's share paid for by the provision of rent-free accommodation for the lobbyists at the council's Pall Mall offices. Quite why a Commonwealth body was shacked up with a PR lobbying group is far from clear.

Although the venture ended three years later, the technique of the lobbyist lives on in the CBC website. Want to do business in a Commonwealth country? Looking for the "VIP treatment" that will allow you to "access decision makers, including heads of government and Commonwealth ministers"? Need someone to "facilitate meetings with government officials of interest to your organisation"?

All it takes is a membership fee, based on your company's turnover. If you're quick, you can sign up in time to take part in the council's 10th anniversary get together here in Kampala, a few days before the presidents, prime ministers and officials arrive.

All this raises a few questions for Mr Kaul and the council, whose members include Coca Cola, Anglo American and Barclays, and such luminaries as South African entrepreneur Cyril Ramaphosa. Is it correct that the council's board endorses Kaul's candidacy for the job of Commonwealth sec-gen? Should he be using CBC staff to help him campaign? Should he ever have led the CBC into the world of business lobbying? Alas, we don't expect answers. The CBC will, we fear, be swept under the Commonwealth carpet, along with other embarrassments such as Zimbabwe, the fiddled election in Nigeria, cabinet-level corruption in Kenya, Tanzania's rigging of elections in Zanzibar, our own president's treatment of the opposition in Uganda and Britain calling off the investigation into BAE bribes.

So business as usual!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

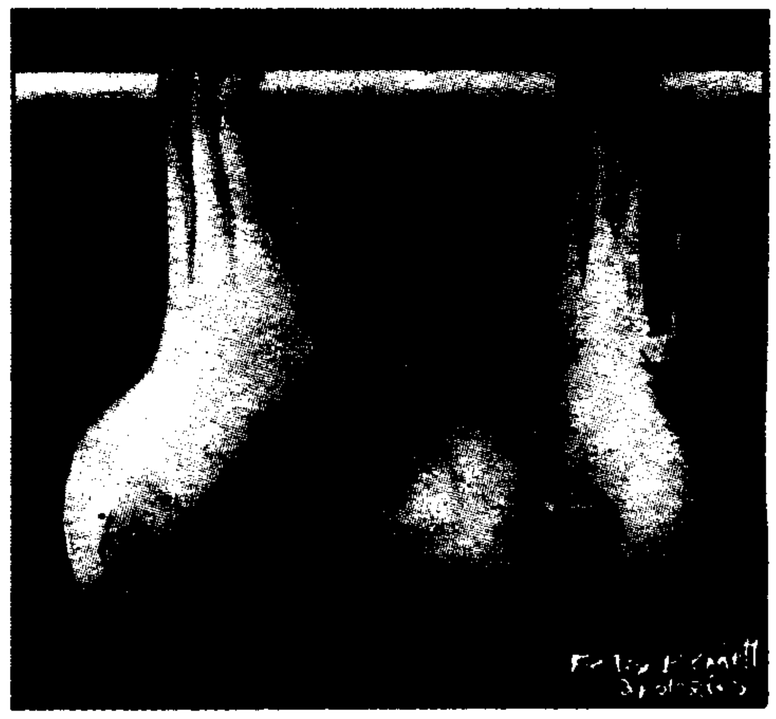
● "The World Association of Ugly People has a saying," Telesforo Lacobelli told reporters in Piobbico, Italy, "that 'ugliness is a virtue, and beauty is slavery'. We believe that a person should be judged for what he is, and not what he looks like, and our new monument represents that philosophy. That's why it is not a statue of a good-looking film star or a dashing war hero, but of an ugly person who is just as beautiful – though only on the inside."

Lacobelli, who is President of the WAUP (known in Italy as the Club dei Brutti), was unveiling a monument in the town square during the annual Festival of the Ugly. "It depicts an unknown person looking at his reflection in a mirror," he explained, "and is our way of challenging stereotypes of beauty and ugliness. The club's history in Piobbico can be traced back to 1879, and until recently, membership was confined to the Marches region of Italy. But now it is a worldwide organisation with 20,000 members, all dedicated to fighting for the rights of ugly people, in a society that seems to value only physical beauty. I'm proud of what we have achieved during my years as President, and am now handing over to my daughter Roberta who, as you can see, is just as well-qualified for the post as I was." *(Daily India, 9/9/07. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

– ● –

● *"Eight thousand US dollars may sound expensive for a brassiere," Dr Eyal Gur told visitors to the Sourasky medical centre in Tel Aviv, "but the Cup & Up bra will last you a lifetime. That's because it's an internal bra, shaping and lifting the breasts from beneath the skin, and thereby doing away with the need for traditional lingerie altogether. It's a simple surgical operation that takes about forty minutes under local anaesthetic. First, we insert two silicone cups about 1cm under the skin, then attach the straps to a pair of titanium screws which we drill into the ribs, and tighten them until the breasts are lifted into a more youthful position. In reality, this is a complete breast lift for little more than the price of an expensive bra, and I am being inundated by ladies who want to be the first to have the operation. There is real excitement. It's such a simple concept I'm surprised no one has thought of it before."*

However, other plastic surgeons have expressed scepticism about the procedure. "The problem is the type of skin a person has," commented Dr Lisa Sacks. "If you haven't got

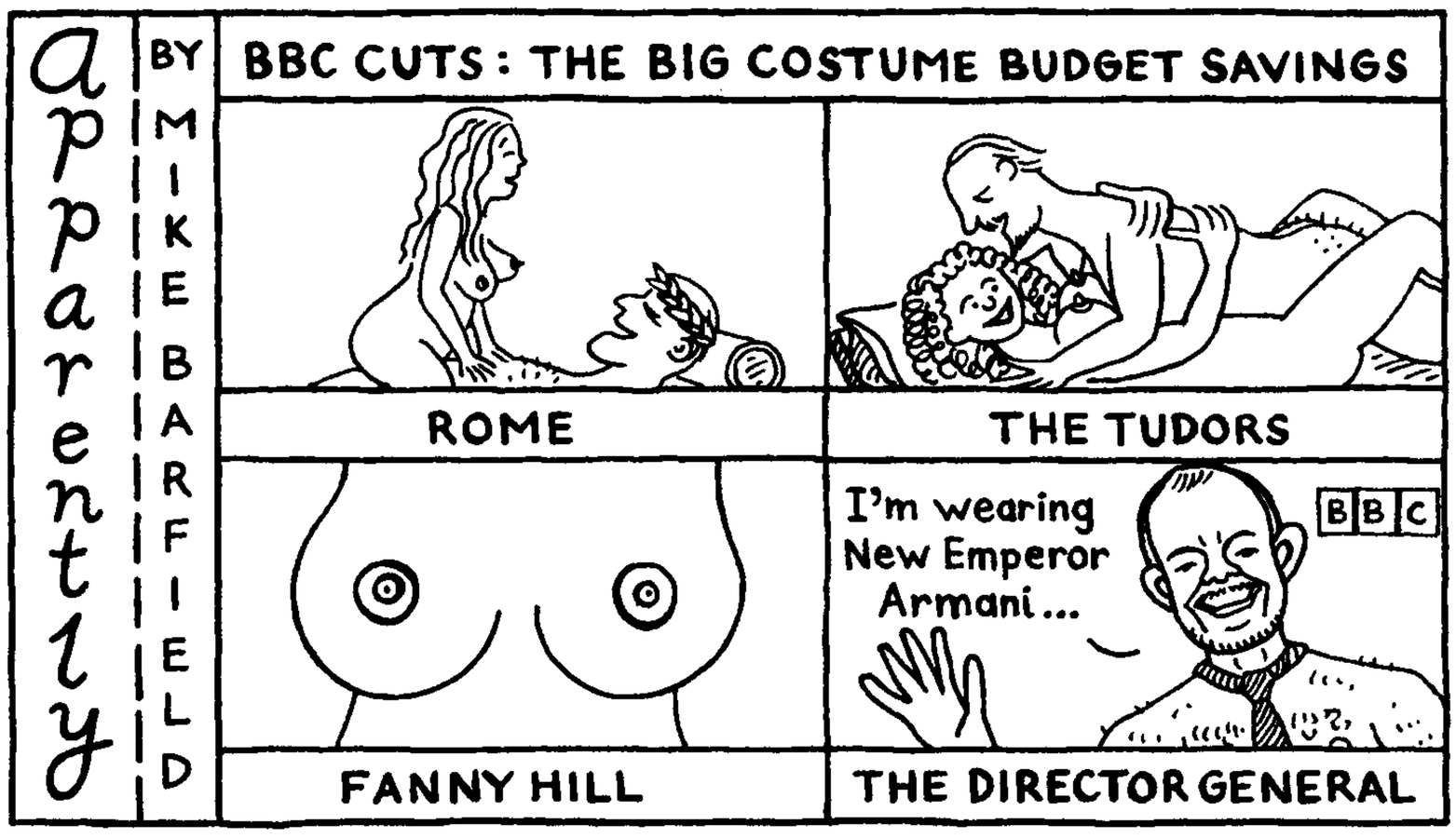


good quality skin, you can do what you want, but your breasts will droop again. You can't stop gravity." (New Kerala, 18/8/07. Spotter: David Dallison)

– ● –

● "It seems that Gajendra Kharatmal was so desperate to qualify as an assistant motor vehicle inspector," a spokesman for the Maharashtra Public Service Commission told reporters in Mumbai, "that he would not let the minimum height requirement of 164 cms stand in his way. After failing his first height test, because he was only 162 cms tall, he approached Dr Vijendra Pawar of City Hospital in Kolhapur, and asked if there was any way of having his skull surgically elevated. Shortly afterwards, he underwent cosmetic skull deformatory surgery, his height increased by 1.9 cms, and he passed his second MPSC height test a few weeks later.

"However, during his interview for the job, the interviewer became concerned about the odd shape of his head, and the question of his artificial elevation arose. After some minutes, Kharatmal confessed to the surgical procedure, and the MPSC official subsequently filed a cheating case against him, and against the doctor who performed the surgery. Kharatmal was later arrested by police, who took him to the JJ Hospital, where the unnatural elevation in his skull was confirmed. He is currently on bail, and police are seeking custody of his sister and cousin, who are believed to have undergone a similar procedure." *(Hindustan Times, 23/8/07. Spotter: Neil Collins)*



EXCLUSIVE EYE SERIALISATION

WARTIME HEROES

by the Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown

No. 1

It takes real courage in the middle of a war to stand up and not be counted. Such was the story of a brave Gordon Highlander in the dark days of the Iraqi war who heroically kept quiet, when all around him his colleagues were going over the top. It would have been all too easy to stand in front of his commander and say, "You're wrong – this is madness. If you carry on with this war, I will not support you". But that would have been the coward's way out. That would have been the dishonourable path taken by weak men like Robin Cook. Instead, the brave Gordon Brown remained at his post, keeping his head down and, as a reward, was made Commander-in-Chief. Such valour is rare in our island's story.

Tomorrow: *How Gordon bravely stormed into the Daily Telegraph and fearlessly hijacked Remembrance Day for himself.*

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S MUCCA-RAKER!!?

■ **HEY Mister Pressman!?! Leave her alone, for gawd's sake!!?! Lady Macca, I'm talkin' about stoopid!!!? Can't you tell that this gal is crackin' up – and I mean fast!?! OK, she might not be everyone's cuppa tea, wavin' her one leg and shovin' her greedy gold-diggin' fingers in Sir Paul's bank balance!?! But, hey! She's a human being who's totterin' on the brink of toppin' herself!? And who's gonna carry the can when poor unhappy Heather decides to end it all?! J'accuse you, Mr Tabloid Tittle-Tattle Torturer, a-sneerin' and a-smearin' Heather's good name with every sentence you write!?! Pack it in – and I mean now!!?**

■WHO DO think you're kidding, Lady so-called Mucca!!?! Blaming Mr Media Man for your woes!?! You've got a nerve, dearie, goin' on the telly a-wingein' and a-gringein', a-moanin' and a-groanin', a-whinin' and a- *(Get on with it! Ed).* Trying to fool us into thinking *you're* the victim and you're just like Princess Di or little Maddie's Mum!?!? Sick or what?!? Take some advice from Auntie Glenda – why don't you buy a one-way ticket to Beachy Head and make sure the tide's in when you jump!?! Then maybe poor old Sir Paul can find happiness with some other one-legged ex-glamour model who is as mad as a snake and a gold-digger to boot!?! No offence, Heather love, I'm just tellin' it like it is!?!!

■ *HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Bonfire Beefcakes!?!*

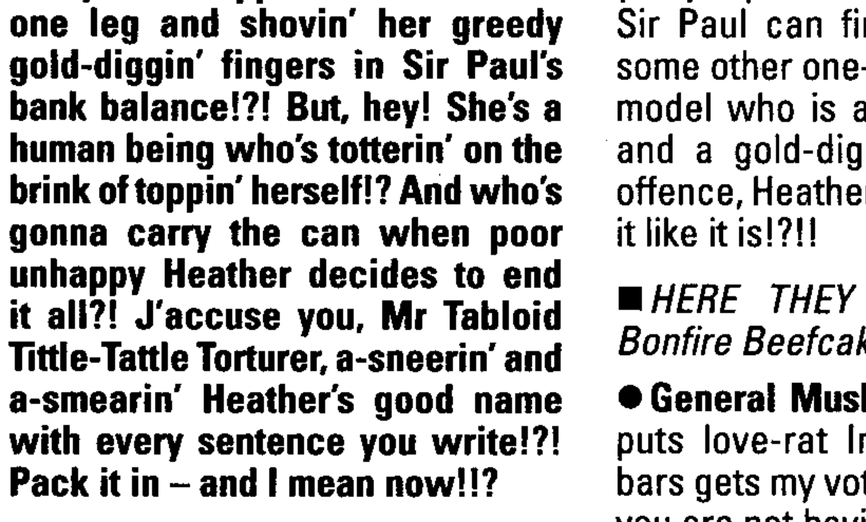
● **General Musharaf.** Anyone who puts love-rat Imran Khan behind bars gets my vote – in the elections you are not having!?!

● **King Tut.** OK, so he's been dead 3,000 years!?! Who cares?!? I'd like to Mmmmm....ummy you!?!! Press the bell, Toot-and-Come-In!?! Geddit!?!

● **Adam Crozier.** The GPO Chief. You're all mail, Big Boy!?! Fancy delivering some letters (French, of course) round to my place??!? And I'll give you a massive bonus!?! Geddit?!

Ciao!? No worries?! Cool!? Be Lucky!?!

(What's wrong with 'Byeee!?!'? Ed.)



"I think we've made a real breakthrough today"

Nursery Times

Friday, November 9, 2007

PUNCH AND JUDY TO LOSE DAYTIME SHOW

by Our Media Staff **Emily Ding-Dong-Bell**

THE long-running Punch and Judy show is to be axed from the schedules, it was revealed last night.

Afternoon viewers have been entertained for years by the antics of Richard Punch and his wife Judy, who bicker with each other whilst interviewing celebrity guests such as policemen, crocodiles and dogs carrying strings of sausages.

Said a spokesman, "The format has become tired and repetitive, so we are hitting it on the head." He concluded, "That's the way to do it, boys and girls."

● **On other pages:**

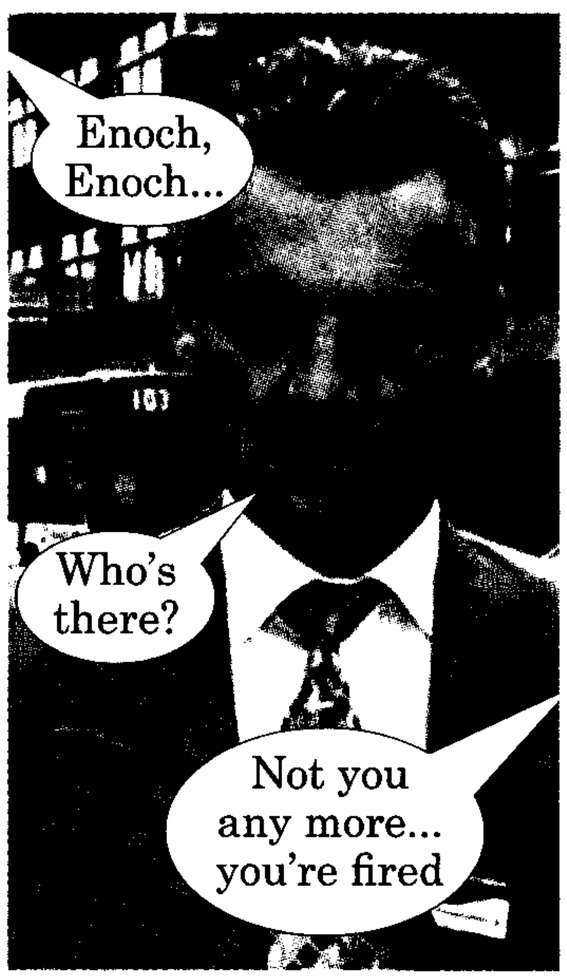
"Eating flies bad for you"
– Doctor tells old woman

"Thumbs give you cancer"
– Little Jack Horner warned

"Four and twenty blackbirds"
– Nigella's exciting new recipe

● **Have you seen Hansel and Gretel?**

TRADITIONAL TORY JOKE



2000 Years Ago in the Times

Virgil Resigns Shock

by Our Political Staff
Maximus Hastings and **Sybil Fawlty**

The poet Virgil today handed in his resignation after making remarks which would later be used by the disgraced politician Enoch Powell. In one passage he described the river Tiber "foaming with blood", a deliberately inflammatory reference to the hordes of Nubians, Ethiopians and Carthaginians who are flooding into Rome and taking Roman jobs from Roman slaves.

FULL STORY Aeneid Book 6

POETRY CORNER

Lines on the return of Sir Trevor McDonald to News At Ten

So. Good
Evening again
Sir Trevor
McDonald,
Famous
Newsreader.

Bong!

Sir Trevor
Returns to
News At Ten.

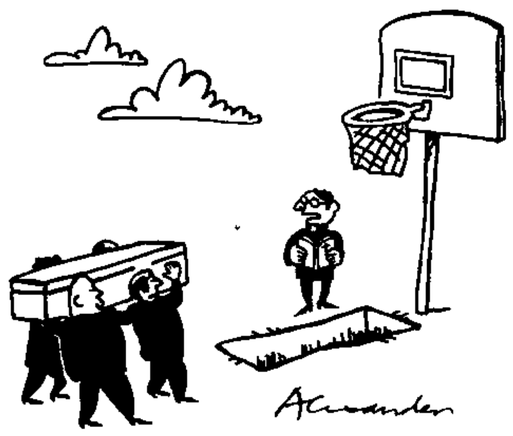
Bong!

We'll be
Back after the
Break.

Bong!

And finally
The goat who
Couldn't get
A mortgage.

E.J. Thribb (17½)



"On 3..."

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO.8

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

Let us be clear what our priorities are in the new and glorious Era of Change.

They are not the discredited priorities of the former leader, with his meaningless and empty slogan 'Education, Education, Education'.

No, our priority, Comrades, is 'Schools, Schools, Schools'.

Let me be frank about it. Far too many of our British schools are failing our nation's children. Thanks to ten years of wasteful tinker-and-tamperism under such Blairite pygmies as the blundering toady ex-Comrade Clarke.

It is now time for firm action against all those schools which are undermining the brilliance of our British children.

They must be rooted out and where necessary razed to the ground, as an example to all the reactionary forces which threaten to destroy from within the march of British educational progress.

Comrades, in pursuing this policy we must be single-minded and ruthless.

If necessary, I will have no hesitation in closing down every school in the country.

I now wish to announce a second top priority in building the Age of Change – namely, the need to eradicate the cancer of obesity which, in the words of Comrade Johnson, poses a greater threat to the future of our planet than global warming.

May I applaude Comrade Johnson for his correct analysis of this social evil which is gnawing at the entrails of new Brownite-Ballsism.

In the new era, no one will be fat, including the highest in the land – and may I here cite as an example of backsliding obesitism, the disgraceful spectacle of the hated reactionary aristocrat and lickspittle Comrade 'Lord' Falconer.

This absurd apparatchik of the former regime has grown fat in all senses of the word on the ill-gotten proceeds of his bourgeois petty fogging legality and his unscrupulous exploitation of his wretched suppliants.

Not content with the rich pickings of his parasitical profession, this overblown gourmand now has the audacity to demand that the people of Britian should pay him a huge pension from the hard-earned fruits of their honest toil.

Let this elephantine blackmailer beware! There is no room for his like in the new lean, efficient Britain of the Age of Change.

I would have called Comrade Falconer a Blairite running dog, except that he is too fat to run anywhere.

Let us rather call him "wobbling dog", as he stumbles into obscurity and oblivion which are the just deserts of any enemy of the British people.

And while we are on the sad subject of enemies of the people, it is my duty once again to single out the shameless machinations of Madame Blair, who sought to sabotage the recent warm and fraternal meeting between your Supreme Leader and Comrade 'King' Abdullah, the leader of the People's Republic of Saudi Arabia.

Enemy of the People

At the very moment when our glorious ally was extending the hand of friendship to the British people, this renegade harpie chose to deliver an extremist, pseudo-feminist rant directed at all that our Arab friends hold most dear, such as stoning women to death when they step out of their allotted place.

Madame Blair should count herself lucky that her squeaky babblings are not rewarded with similar just punishment!

Gordon Brown

The Supreme Leader

HERO OF THE PEOPLE

Comrade Headmaster Seldon

All members of the Party are instructed to read a brilliant and devastating new book 'The Great Leap Backward' by Comrade Seldon.

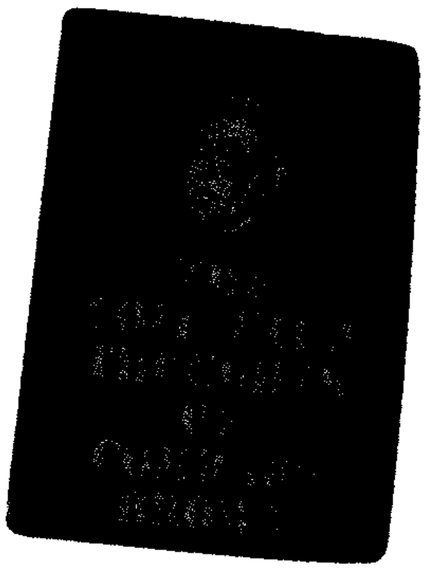
Here they will learn the true nature of the regime presided over by the discredited charlatan Blair and his money-grubbing wife (see above).

They will read how the Supreme Leader became so outraged by the corruption, ignorance and cretinous stupidity of the Blairite-Mandelsonian axis that he was forced on occasion to resort to the robust and earthy language of his native Glaswegian shipyards.

Comrade Headmaster Seldon has done the nation a great service by exposing the reality behind the sham façade created by Campbellian spin-ism.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"What is most important in the Age of Change is not change itself but continuity in change and change in continuity"



Taken from the Little Brown Book, the Collected Thoughts of Comrade Brown, from the chapter entitled "Resolving Contradictory Tendencies Amongst The Political Cadres"

RED LINES

Then – 1807 Now – 2007

Advertisement

From the makers of Tapas 5, Tapas 7 and Tapas 8

TAPAS 9

They were just a bunch of doctors and their partners holidaying on the Algarve...

And then, the ***UNTHINKABLE***

Be afraid, be very afraid

The Portuguese police are coming to arrest **you** soon!
(and everyone else in Britain too)

'We Have No Idea How Many There Are' Admits Immigration Chief

by Our Political Staff **Phil Country**

THE HEAD of Britain's immigration department today confessed that the official figure for the number of idiots in his department was much higher than originally thought.

"There are thousands of them working here," he said, "most of them are completely unskilled and we can't just send them home."

He denied that earlier estimates of the scale of the idiot problem had been deliberately misleading.

"It's very hard to count the true number of idiots here – particularly when you have given the counting job to an idiot."

He concluded, "But don't worry. If you have a problem with immigration remember that my door is always open."

Late news

● THERE was shock today after it was revealed that nearly half of the million and a half new jobs created under this government were being given to British people. "This is intolerable," said a concerned person, "British people should be allowed to sit at home and watch GMTV and Deal or No Deal, and not pick strawberries or work on building sites or serve coffee to *(cont. p. 94.)*

That All-purpose Alcohol Health Scare Story Article In Full

NEW RESEARCH published today has revealed that drinking one glass of red wine a day **is beneficial to your heart and likely to prevent coronaries/ certain to give you any number of cancers.**

It went on to state that pregnant women who drink one glass of wine a day **are not putting at risk the health of their unborn child/certain to give birth to a deformed, brain-dead mutant.**

The report also found that a man drinking more than two glasses of red wine a day would **end up trouserless on a park-bench with the rest of the alcoholics/ find it had little impact on his overall health.**

LEWIS HAMILTON 'SICK OF HOUNDING'

by Our Formula One Correspondent **Bernie Eccle-not-stunned**

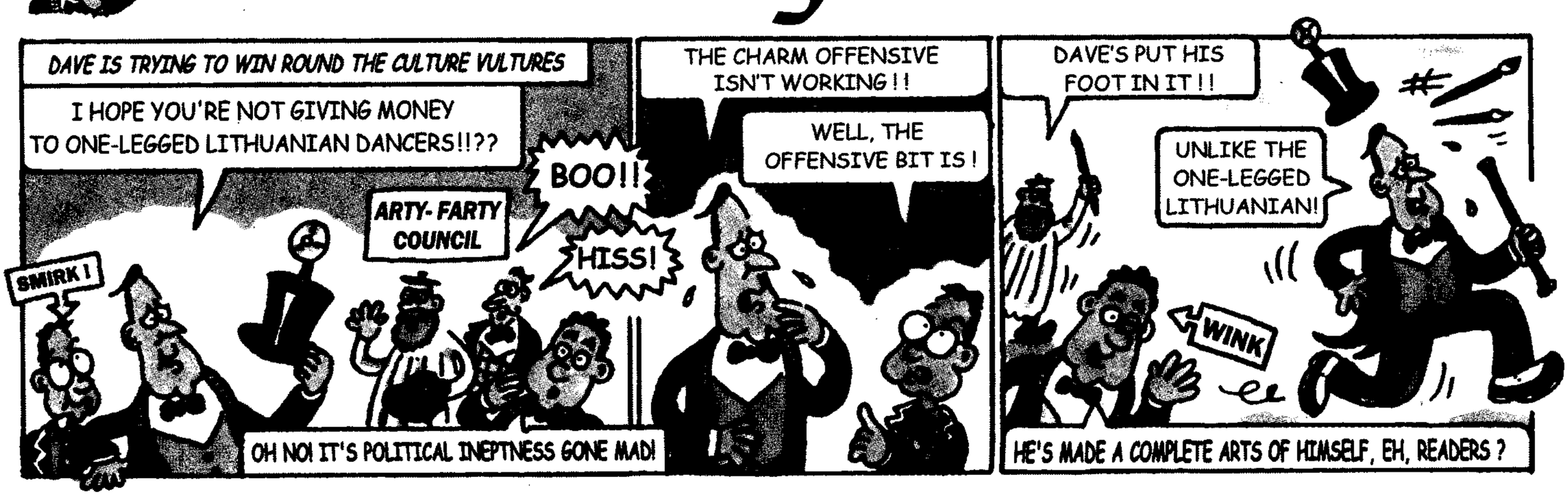
BRITISH F1 motoring sensation Lewis Hamilton has revealed that he is fleeing Britain for Switzerland so that his money can get some much needed privacy.

"My millions can't go into any high street bank without being hounded by fans from the Inland Revenue demanding I pay tax," said a distraught Hamilton.

"I know that my money will never get any peace until I flee the country for a tax haven."

The authorities in Switzerland have promised Hamilton that his millions will enjoy unrivalled privacy far from the prying eyes of Britain's tax men.

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


DAVE IS TRYING TO WIN ROUND THE CULTURE VULTURES
I HOPE YOU'RE NOT GIVING MONEY TO ONE-LEGGED LITHUANIAN DANCERS!!??
BOO!!
ARTY- FARTY COUNCIL
HISS!
SMIRK!
OH NO! IT'S POLITICAL INEPTNESS GONE MAD!
THE CHARM OFFENSIVE ISN'T WORKING!!
WELL, THE OFFENSIVE BIT IS!
DAVE'S PUT HIS FOOT IN IT!!
UNLIKE THE ONE-LEGGED LITHUANIAN!
WINK
HE'S MADE A COMPLETE ARTS OF HIMSELF, EH, READERS?

Court Circular

(Sponsored by Bae Systems)

Buckingham Palace, Tuesday

His Supreme Highness and Custodian of the Fourteen Million Holy Oil Wells, King Abdullah-Abdul-bin-al-Fayed of Saudi Arabia, today commenced a State visit in London to Her Majesty the Queen and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.

A procession was formed as follows from Heathrow Airport to the Palace.

1st Coach
(The Edward VII Imperial Coronation Landau)

HM The Queen and His Majesty King Abdullah

2nd Coach

HRH Prince Philip, accompanied by their Royal Highnesses the Princes Abdul-al-Shufti, Mohammed-al-Shifti and Asif-al-Shafti

1st Armoured Car

Chief Bodyguard to the Custodian of the Holy Oil Wells, General Prince Rashid-al-Bashem-al-Smashem and Chief Inspector Knacker, Commander of the Queen's Own Protection Squad

1st Rolls Royce

Sir Alan Fitztightly, Equerry to the Old Queen, accompanied by the Blackmailer Royal Mr Ian Sleazeball, Prince Wasim-bin-Laden-al-Qaeda, Head of His Majesty's Very Special Forces Overseas and Lady Laetitia Starborgling, Mistress of the Queen's Hatpins

First Open-Top Bendy Bus

His Holiness the Imam Khalifa of Jihad, Head of Wahabi Export Studies at the University of Mecca, and the Rev. J.C. Flannel, Chair of the Interfaith Liaison Committee of the Church of England

First Camel

His Highness Prince Q'ruki, Keeper of the Royal Backhanders

Second Camel

Mr Roger Browne-Envelope, Contract Facilitation Department, Bae Systems, Riyadh

First Man with Placard

Mr Hugh Man-Rights (subsequently arrested by Inspector Knacker and held for 28 days under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005)

First Bicycle

Mr Boris Johnson, prospective candidate for London Mayor, having lost his way to the House of Commons after spending an agreeable afternoon discussing London transport issues with Miss Samantha ('Sam') Starborgling, daughter of Lady Laetitia *(see above)*

There was then a ceremonial fly-past of RAF Eurofighters, towing a banner bearing the legend 'Buy One, Get One Free'. This was followed by a fly-past of rare Hen Harriers which were shot down by HRH the Prince Harry, accompanied by his friend Count Heinrich von Ricketson-Smythe O.E.

That Buckingham Palace Menu in full

Crude-oil-ités
Brown Nose Windsor Soup

– ❋ –

Halal Fish Fingers (in Till)
Appease Pudding
Choice Cuts of Hand (off the bone)

– ❋ –

Roast Sucking-up Pig
Tornados of BAeef with Gravy Train
Torture Rack of Lamb on a Behead of Lettuce

– ❋ –

Arabian Dessert
Bread and Buttering-Up Pudding

– ❋ –

TO DRINK:
Al Quaeda-free Beer
Assorted Milked Sheikhs

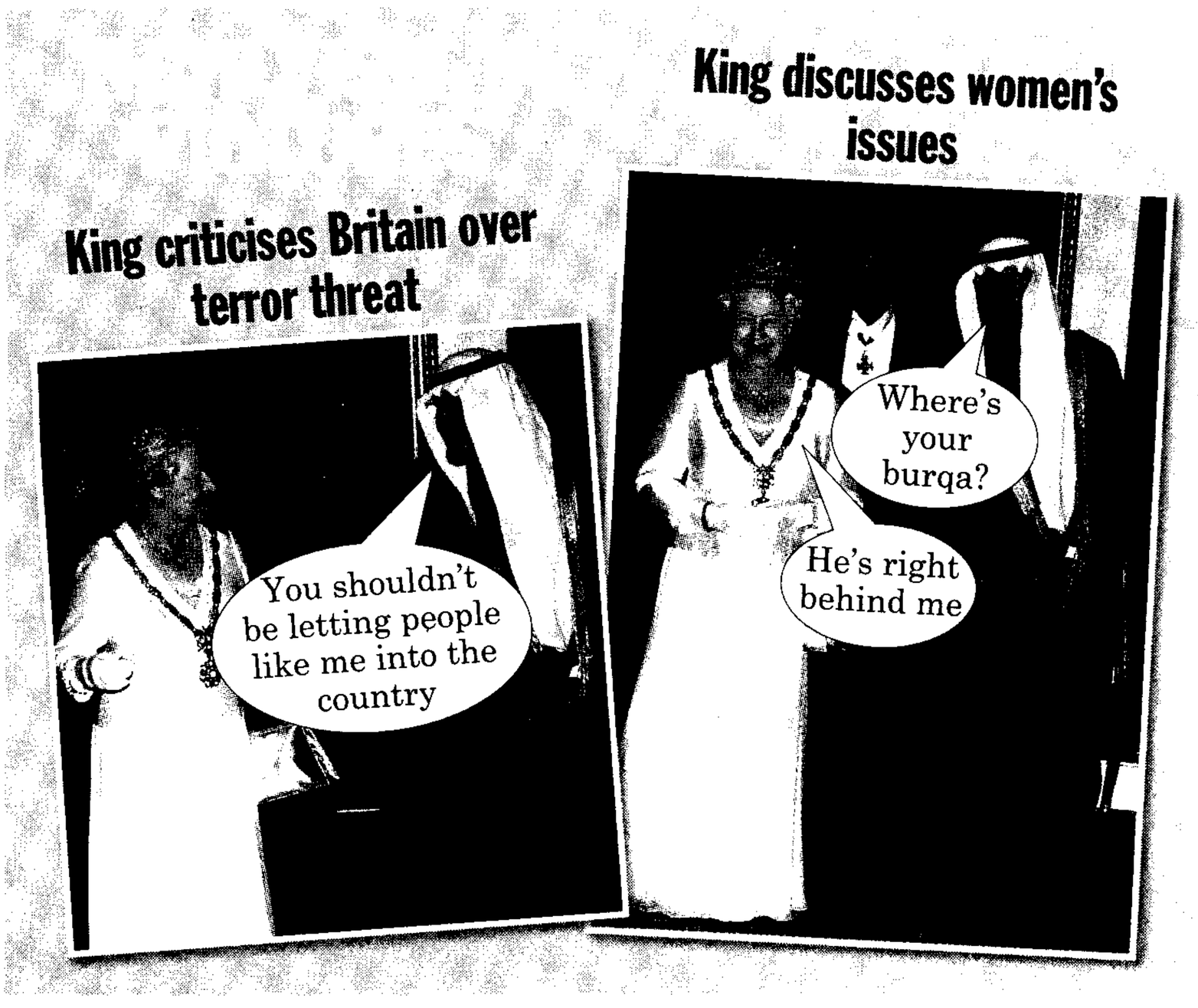
The band of the Welsh Guards then played the following programme:

Strictly Cwm Rhondda

A Star Wars-on-Terror medley, including The Imperial Stormtroopers March and the theme tune from Return of the Jeddah

and

A selection from the musical Seven Bribes For Seven Brothers


King criticises Britain over terror threat
You shouldn't be letting people like me into the country
King discusses women's issues
Where's your burqa?
He's right behind me

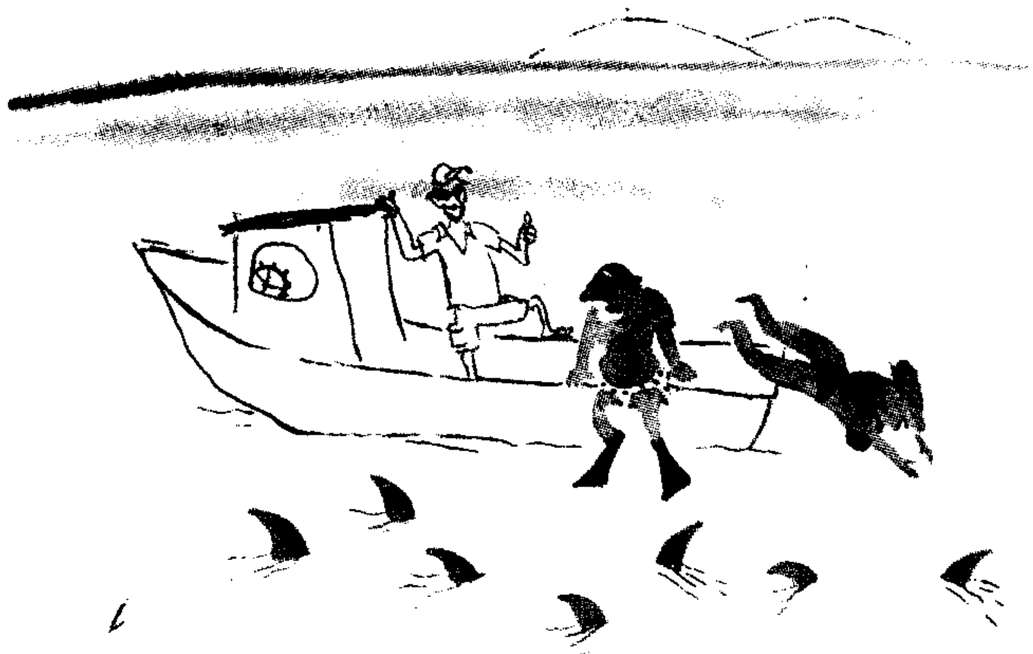
RUTH KELLY
An Apology

I WOULD like to apologise to the British public for using taxpayers' money to promote the Labour party in a supposedly non-partisan pamphlet entitled "New Labour – Best Thing Since Sliced Bread".

It was wrong of me to spend public funds trumpeting the incredible achievements of New Labour during its unprecedented ten-year period of success and I should not have pointed out, correctly, that no other government has anything like as good a record on health, education, public services and the economy. Indeed, it is a measure of the honesty and decency of this wonderful administration that I am *making* this apology, which is of course being paid for by the taxpayer.

It just remains for me to say, "Vote Labour – You Know It Makes Sense".

Ruth Kelly
Minister for Transport



"You're quite sure they are dolphins?"

DOESN'T Nigella look marvellous? Like all other women in Britain I've been thrilled to see that gorgeous sexy Nigella is back with even more curves than ever! She is an inspiration to us all, big, buxom and beautiful and brave enough not to care about a few extra pounds here and there (well mostly there!!).

SHE'S sending out a clear message to all us working mums trying to juggle kids, career and cooking – eat all the pies you want – and the cakes too – and drown them in cream and chocolate and lard for good measure! And it really doesn't matter if you start filling out a little and going up a dress size or three! Because Nigella doesn't care how big her bum looks on TV! She's not counting calories or worrying that she is going to break the bathroom scales.

THAT'S why sad middle-aged men like the useless Simon still turn over from James May's Extreme Pipe Smoking on UK Dave 24 Gold to try and catch a glimpse of her dumplings on Nigella Excess on BBC2! But we women love her too. Because she's feisty, fulsome, fleshy and let's face it... FAT! Yes, that's the secret of her success – she makes the rest of us feel thin! Thanks Nigella, for the women of this country you're a genuine Roly-Poly Model!

© Polly Filler 2007.

The Blair Speech That All America is Dying to Hear

(and most of them will)

My fellow Americans,

It gives me great pleasure to be here in this lovely city of (fill in name).

As I was coming here tonight a taxi driver said to me (fill in local joke with punch-line "Aren't you the British guy who appeared on the Simpsons?").

But to be serious for a moment – we are all today facing a new and terrible peril, which reminds me of the dark days of the 1930s when Britain and America stood alone against the weapons of mass-destruction wielded by Adolf bin Laden.

9/11 was the Pearl Harbor of World War Three. It is time for us all to be scared, very scared indeed. Think of a mushroom cloud covering your beautiful city of (fill in same name as city mentioned earlier. IMPORTANT NOTE: if you are in Denver, do not say New Dworkin).

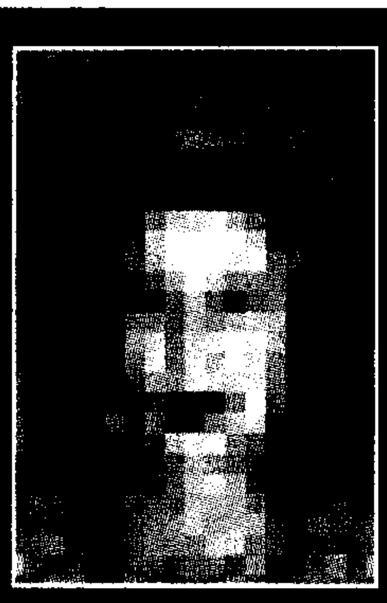
But do not despair, my fellow Americans. All it requires is for Britain and America to stand together as they have done through the centuries, right back to the Battle of Yorktown.

And I give you my solemn promise, as Prime Minister of Britain, that I am ready at any time to join shoulder to shoulder with your great President and my closest friend George W. Bush in the historic task of bombing Iran to smithereens.

Please may I now have my cheque for $250,000?

PA BROON IS FAIR PISHED AT YON HOME OFFICE HEN JOCKIE SMITH...
THE BROON-ITES
THE FECKLESS FOLK FLOODED BY FOREIGNERS!
AH CANNAE KEN HOW YE GOT THA' IMMIGRATION FIGURES SO ARSE-ABOOT-FIZZER YE NUMPTY BAMPOT!
AH DINNAE KEN HOO IT HAPPENED, GORDON...
OFFICE OF HAZEL BLEARS
OFFICE OF ALISTAIR DARLING
CAT FLAP
HENRY DAVIES
IT ISNAE GUID ENOUGH, JOCKIE!
AH HOPE YE'VE TAKEN MEASURES TAE MAK' SURE ALL THESE HOME OFFICE STATISTICS ARE BONNIE AND ABOVE BOARD.
ABSOLUTELY FURIOUS PUFF
DINNAE FASH YERSEL' GORDON, AH'VE GOT MA SOME NEW WHITEHALL MANDARINS REET HERE...
OFFICE OF JOCKIE SMITH
THIS IS PAVEL, HIS WIFIES AND HIS TWENTY-EIGHT BAIRNS! THEY'RE BRAW GUID WORKERS! THEY'RE REFININ' MA HOME OFFICE STATISTICS NOO, AND THEN THEY'RE AFF CLEANING MA HOOSE IN THA' AFTERNOON!
SCRATCH
JINGS
...CRIVVENS AND HELP MA BORAT!
HOME OFFICE STATISTICS
HOME OFFICE FIGURES
IMMIGRATION FIGURES
1 from Africa 2 from India 5 from Poland
SWADDLED
IMMIGRATION STATISTICS

TOP ROYAL NAMED IN BLACKMAIL SCANDAL



by Our Court Staff
Maddy Tupp

IN THE most shocking scandal to have rocked the Royal Family for over a century, a very senior member of the Royal Family has been identified at the centre of a sensational blackmail drama involving drugs and sex acts "of an unnatural nature".

Prince Charles

It is understood that the Royal personage concerned may be named in connection with a high-profile coming court case which could shake Britain's monarchy to its foundations.

Duke of Edinburgh

The scandal is said to be so "sensitive" that the Palace has imposed a total blackout on talking to the press, refusing to confirm or deny that the Queen herself was involved in the sordid drugs-and-sex story.

Prince Harry

By last night, however, as London was awash with lurid rumours reaching up to the very highest levels of the Royal Family, an authoritative Australian internet website, www.pommiepooftah.co.au, had already named a man who some years ago worked briefly for a business in which a junior member of the Royal Family owns shares.

The Late Duke of Gloucester

We know the name of this individual but we are unable to reveal it owing to the fact that it is not anything like as interesting as we first thought it might be.

A History of Royal Shame

by Leading Historian
Captain Corelli's Barnett

THIS is not the first time that the good name of the Royal Family has been dragged through the mire of a squalid blackmail case.

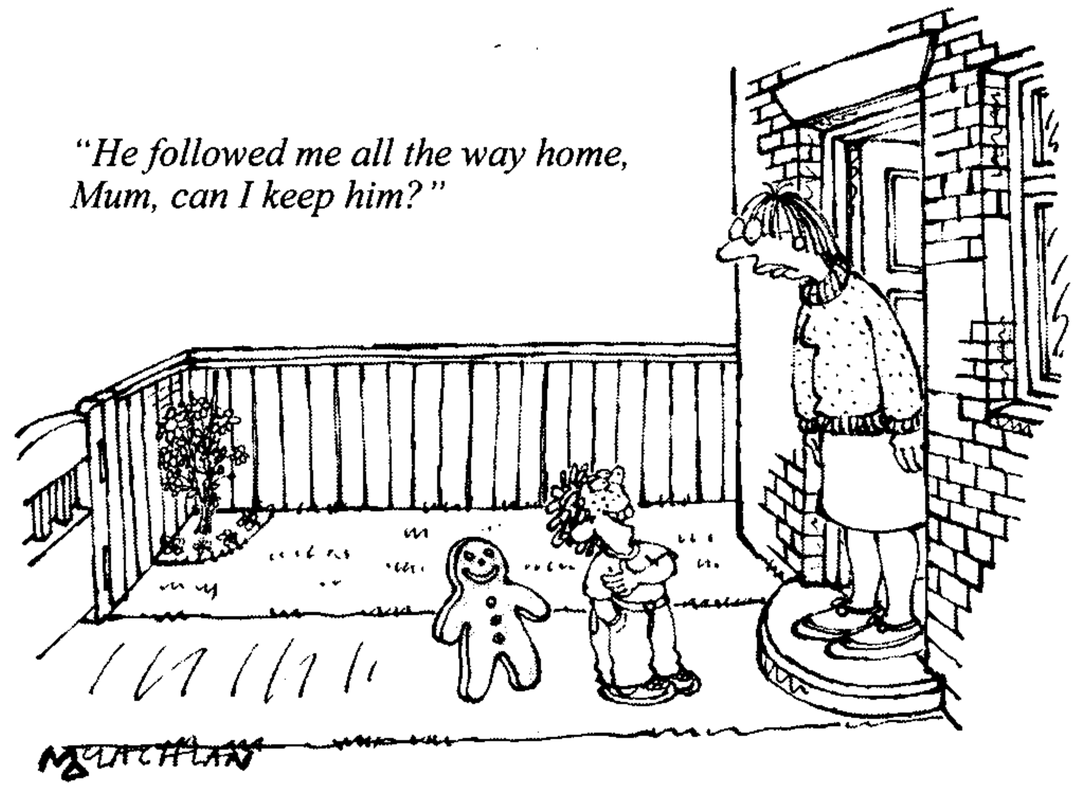
In 1897, the young Duke of St Pancras, Queen Victoria's great nephew, was approached by a notorious underworld figure of the time, Captain Harry Silvester, who claimed he had irrefutable proof that the young Royal had been caught cheating at a game of Bezique at the seat of the 14th Marquess of Berkmannanshire.

Captain Silvester demanded "50 golden sovereigns" to secure his silence, adding that he also knew of the young Duke's "close friendship" with the notorious sodomite" Lord Alfred Tennyson, known to his circle as "Lunchtime O'Bosey".

The captain's body was later found washed up on the shore of Wapping Reach, with a note pinned to his cravate reading "I tell you the Duke of Fuggin' Edinburgh did it. Signed 'One who knows', a respected merchant of Port Said".

Worse was to come when in 1932, the then Duke of Windsor was approached by an officer of the Household Cavalry, Captain Larry Silvester, who claimed to have secretly shot 8mm kinematoscope film footage showing the heir to the throne illegally moving his croquet ball in front of the 4th hoop during a spirited and close-fought encounter at Auchtermuchty Castle, the seat of Highland laird, the McKay of McKay.

Silvester also implied that the Duke was "an intimate friend" of Noel Coward the celebrated playwright and cabaret artiste of the day. It was an open secret that Mr Coward – known as "Noelie" to his friends – was *(cont. p. 94)*



Traditional Nursery Rhymes

Who Killed Hen Harrier?
"Not I," said Prince Harry,
"With my bow and arry.
I was just having fun,
Shooting peasants with my gun."

Who saw him die?
"I" said the twitcher
"I recognised the bird from its picture,
In my book of the Top 60 British Birds
of Prey Threatened with Extinction."

Who found the bird's body?
"No one" said PC Snoddy
(Of the Norfolk Constabulary)
"Which makes our job very difficult."

Who told the hacks,
By phone or by fax?
"I" said Prince Charles,
"I did the calling,
It really is appalling."

So all the readers of the papers were a-sobbin' and a-sighin'
As they read the sad story of the Hen Harriers dyin'.

© Prince William McGonagall

CALLOUS PAPARAZZI 'DID NOTHING TO HELP'

by Our In the Gutter Press **Romuald Ratarsed**

PHOTOGRAPHERS chasing a royal exclusive were branded "sick and heartless" yesterday when it was revealed that rather than help the royal victim they stood by and took photographs.

Said a shocked witness, "They could see that Prince Harry was dead drunk but instead of intervening they merely tried to make money out of him and *(cont. p94.)*

THE BOOK OF EHUD

Chapter 94

1. And lo, it came to pass in the land of Gaza, that the Hamasites rose up against the children of Israel.
2. Then they launched rockets into the land of Israel that are called Katyusha, which is to say, "We bought these cheap off Mr Putin".
3. Then Ehud, the leader of the Israelites, waxed wrath and rent his garments and cried aloud saying, "Woe unto ye, ye Hamasites, for ye have verily gone too far this time".
4. And he then sayeth, "Let there be no light".
5. And there was no light. And Ehud saw that it was good.
6. Then darkness fell upon Gaza and the hum of the conditioners of air and the freezers that are called fridges were stilled even as the hum of the desert wasp is stilled when it sleepeth in the desert of Yentob.
7. And Ehud cried again, "Listen to me ye scorpions of darkness and thinketh thou on't".
8. "If thou taketh not heed then next time I will command the waters that they flow not into your land."
9. "And your throats will be parched and your fruit shall whither upon the vine, yea, even your figs shall shrivel and be as food for the swine."
10. "Not that I wouldeth do this obviously, but don't be-eth too sure, thou sons and daughters of darkness."
11. And Ehud rejoiced privily with exceeding great joy and sayeth unto himself,
12. "This is even better than the smiting".

(To be continued forever...)

MILIBAND AMERICAN ADOPTION ROW

by Our Political Staff
Lunchtime O'Bstetrics

A HUGE political row erupted last night over the decision by Foreign Secretary David Miliband to fly off to the United States to adopt a little American policy.

Mr Miliband, who has asked the media to respect his privacy, is thought to be unable to have any policies of his own.

Full story and no pics, p.94.

"Actually it's 'legacy'"

Last night's national TV awards in full

MOST FRAUDULENT TV SHOW

Winner:
Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Fakeaway

Phone lines still open on 089798 34621.
Your vote *STILL* counts.
Calls charged at only £999 per minute.

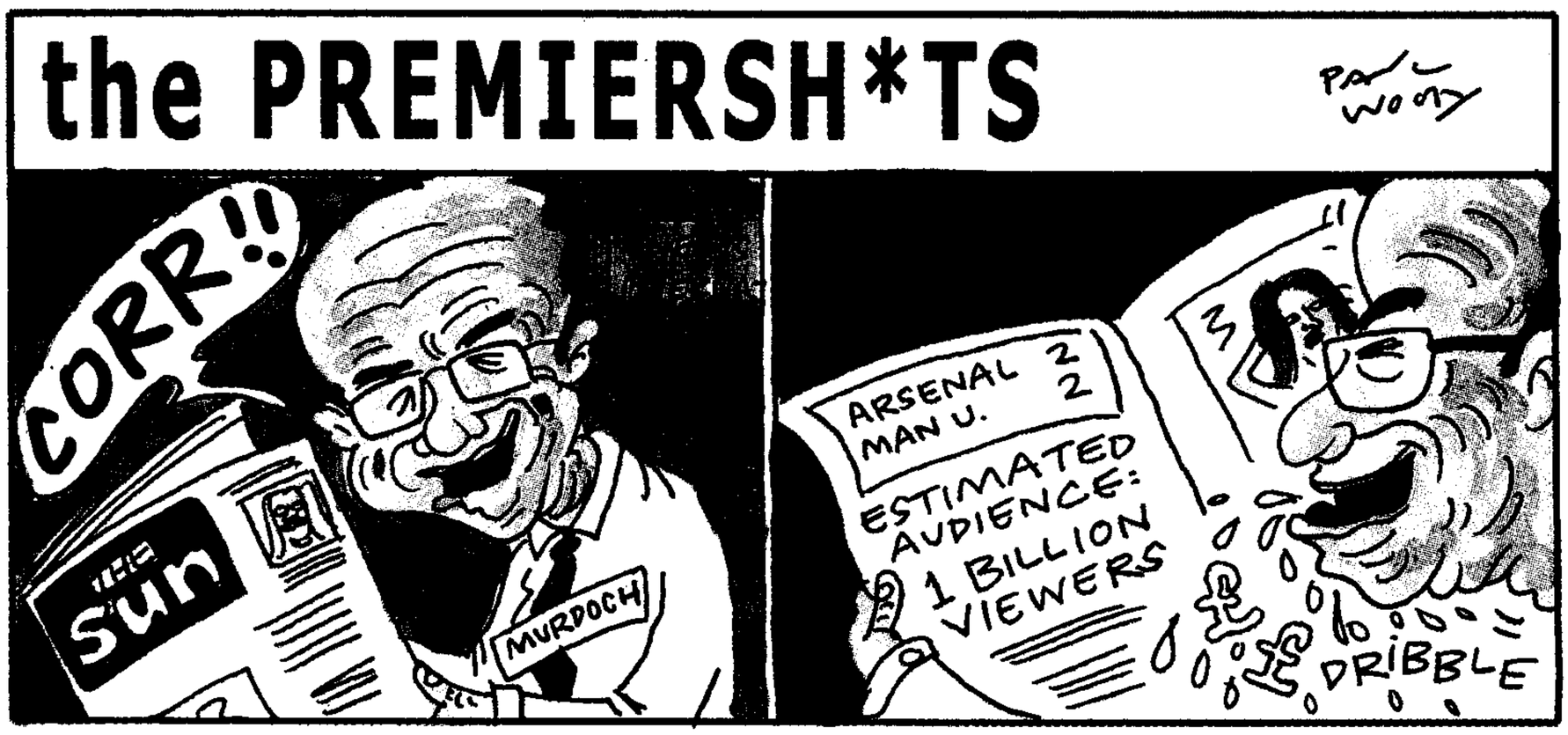
HOW RETAIL WORKS

A Cabbie writes

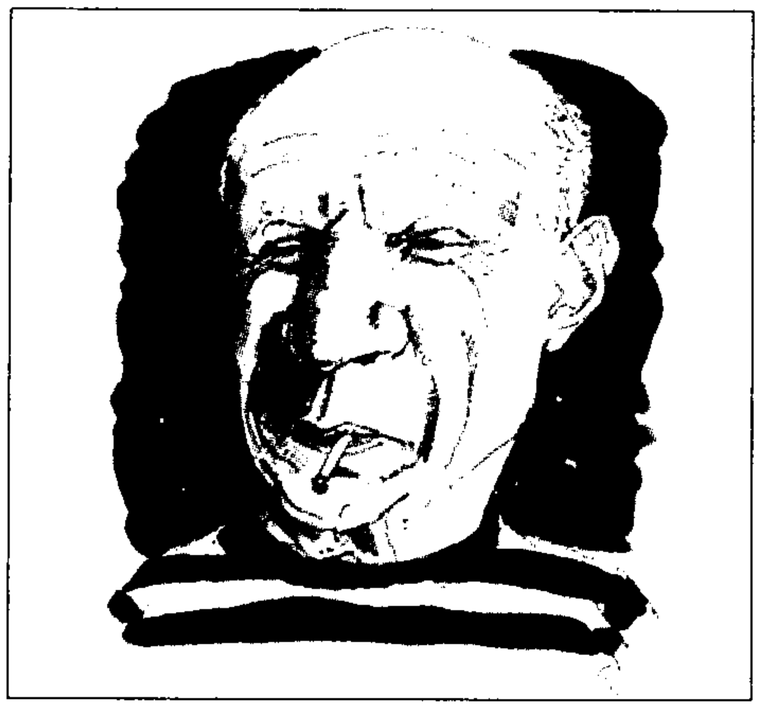
EVERY week a well-known Professor of History is invited to comment on an issue of topical importance. This week: **Prof. Norman Stone** (Ankara Mini-cab no. 3412) on the Kurdish threat to Turkey.

Blimey, guv, those Kurds, they've got a bloody nerve, trying to invade Turkey! After all we've done for them! Know what I'd do with them Kurds. String 'em up, just like we did with them Armenians, not that we did mind you, that's an appalling slur on the good folk of Turkey. Blimey, they'll be stopping us joining the EU next, I had that Kemal Ataturk in the back of the cab once. Very clever man. You didn't bring a bottle of Scotch through Customs did you – I've got a terrible thirst on me.

NEXT WEEK: Sarah 'Slosher' Kennedy (cab no. 621) on the difficulty of spotting black people in the dark until they open their mouths.



DIARY



A LIFE OF PICASSO
by JOHN RICHARDSON
Volume XXVII: The Uneventful Fortnight

On May 23rd 1933, Picasso attended a fancy-dress party thrown by the celebrated dandy and *homme de gout* Boni de Castellane. Guests included Cocteau (no spring chicken he!), Poulenc, Auric, the Hugos, Violette Murat, Radiguet, the insufferable Ottoline Morrell and the utterly beastly and obsequious Clive Bell, looking like heaven-knows-what, having come dressed up as some sort of Widow Twankey.

I was also there, incidentally. This made Picasso terribly, terribly happy.(i) Earlier in the day, Picasso had completed his painting, *Bathers Outside a Beach Hut With Porcupine*, now hanging, very poorly, in the Museum of Modern Art. Tedious hack critics, the ghastly Clive Bell among them, have identified the objects sitting atop the porcupine as three bosoms, in red, yellow and green. This shows how little they know. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is quite obviously a set of traffic lights. Over the years, ignoramuses have questioned why a set of traffic lights should be sitting on the head of a porcupine. These dimwits have obviously never encountered the congestion that occurs on a Spring evening in Juan-Les-Pins.

Picasso's attitude to boiled sweets has been the subject of much debate. His preference, some say, was for Barley Sugar, whilst others maintain he preferred the old-fashioned "gob-stopper". One or two, including the meretricious Clive Bell, have even suggested that he enjoyed Liquorice All-Sorts. Such a claim flies in the face of reason, since experts have proved that the Liquorice All-Sort has never counted as a boiled sweet. For one thing, it is far too chewy, but these stupid people – among them the pushy Clive Bell, who had no knowledge of boiled sweets whatsoever – couldn't be expected to know *that*.

Did Picasso ever include a boiled sweet in a painting? Received wisdom suggests that his *Weeping Woman 11* (1936) is seeking comfort from a throat lozenge. Others point to the figure on the right in his *Bathers Outside a Beach Cabana* (1929) and say that her transparent sense of *weltschmerz* is caused by the bubble-gum that may have enlodged itself in her tresses. And then there will always be those who maintain that the gentleman's erect member painted as a circle in *Seated Male Nude* (1927) is in fact a Polo Mint.

The full history of Picasso and his vexed relations with boiled sweets must, alas, wait for a future volume, "Picasso: The Too Good To Hurry Years".

For the moment, let it suffice to say that he was rarely, if ever, observed sucking on a boiled sweet whilst painting, and once, when offered a Lemon Sherbet by the rich, spoiled homosexual narcissist Jean Cocteau, whose family money, incidentally, came from dry-cleaning, of all things, and whose coarse, unsophisticated father sported a singularly ill-fitting toupee, Picasso declined, saying thank you, but he had just had luncheon. Three days later, he painted *Woman in an Armchair* now hanging in the Musee Picasso, and some have detected a suggestion of Lemon Sherbet in the distinct yellow oval just above the woman's right eyebrow.

On May 24th, 1933, Picasso awoke at around 7.15 am, and proceeded to the kitchen, where he made himself a cup of coffee. Whether he drank it from a white cup or a blue cup has divided art historians ever since. My own belief, based on personal knowledge of the artist, was that it was the blue cup, as it now seems probable that he had employed the white cup for a cup of Mint Tea on the evening before, and it is unlikely that he would have washed it in time for the morning. It was, incidentally, sadly typical of Gertrude Stein that she should always have served coffee to her guests in hot-water-bottles rather than in cups or even (heaven forfend!) mugs. This ensured that the coffee in question would dribble down their chins and their necks but rarely, if ever, into their mouths. Sadly, Gertrude was always struggling for effect, (as, incidentally, was the odious, weasel-faced, pouting hypocrite Clive Bell, whom Picasso once privately informed me he despised.(ii))

At approximately 7.37 am, Picasso motioned into his studio, where he set to work on four sculptures, two stage designs, six paintings and an indiscreetly Sadean affair with a busty young serving girl he had first encountered the previous afternoon behind the counter of a corner *patisserie* where he had stopped to purchase three croissants, a marzipan sponge and a single chocolate eclair. The girl in question is pictured as a watering-can in his unfinished masterpiece, *Garden Table at Dinard*.

Behind him in the same queue at the patisserie that morning, waiting dutifully in line for their various comestibles, were Stravinsky, the lightweight Cocteau, the Swiss writer C.F. Ramuz, John Dos Passos, Sarah and Gerald Murphy (Gerald still with a hint of eyeliner from the night before), Sachaverell Sitwell, Poulenc, Ansermet (the conductor of *Les Noces*), Zelda Fitzgerald (scarily clutching a half-bottle of cheap brandy and an open blade, her over-vivid lipstick applied haphazardly to that area of her face situated between her eyebrows to the North and her chin to the South), T.S. Eliot, the (to my mind much over-rated) choreographer Nijinska, the specious Tristan Tzara, Gracie Fields, Violette Murat (who had, I later learned, once enjoyed a brief *affaire* with that great dud Clive Bell, of all people), Andre Breton, Count Etienne de Beaumont, and a great many more. I myself dropped into the *patisserie* later that day for a currant bun, but, alack and alas, to my great distress they had already sold out.(iii)

Before luncheon on the 24th of May, Picasso changed his shoes from a pair of plimsolls to a pair of light brown leather walking-shoes, purchased six months earlier from the singularly butter-fingered cobbler Monsieur LeBas on the Rue Goncourt. He then took approximately eight steps into his dining-room, where he joined his uninteresting wife Olga and her dim-witted mother for a bowl of tepid onion soup followed by a nourishing fish stew. After a two-minute break to partake of his ablutions, he returned to his studio, where completed a further six sculptures, five paintings and a bust of his latest conquest, the under-maid who had served him his fish stew, whom he was to portray as an unfolded napkin, or serviette as the ill-bred Clive Bell, within my pained hearing, used to term it. In the early evening Picasso adjourned to (continued for 94 years).

(i) Anyway, that's what he told me and you weren't even there.
(ii) Oh yes he did.
(iii) I was later reliably informed by an eyewitness that Alice B. Toklas had beaten me to it.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

SO HOW WAS THE GIG LAST NIGHT?
HEY, IT WAS GREAT, DAD. I WAS PROUD OF YOU...
YOU WERE AWESOME, MAN! YOU WERE TOTALLY OUT THERE! YOU WERE SO IN THE GROOVE!
REALLY?
YEAH. YOU WERE SMOKING, MAN!
I WAS, WASN'T I?
I KNEW IT'D GET ME IN THE PAPERS. THAT'S WHY I LIT UP...
GARY BLOKE SMOKES ON STAGE!

Literary Review

What a pranker!

Head On: The Autobiography

Ian Botham

(Ebury Press, £18.99)

OF MANY writers it has been said that they tend to write the same book again and again, but only is it literally true of sportsmen writing their memoirs.

This is Ian Botham's third autobiography in 13 years and yet, as mathematicians will have spotted, he has still only lived the one life. Youthful ebullience... fastest to 1,000 Test runs and 100 Test wickets... Headingley 1981... marathon charity walks... likes a drop... it's all here, just as it was last time and the time before that, and just as it will be next time, and the time after that.

Sporting tradition has it that the first autobiography is usually called "An Autobiography". You then progress to "The Autobiography" and finally, when the market is deemed to be saturated, "The Definitive Autobiography". Then you die and the biographies start rolling out. There is no end to it.

Botham, of course, has been polishing these stories for years in personal appearances and speaking tours. Sometimes when reading this latest book, you can feel your lips forming the words before your eyes have reached them. Even if you don't know all the anecdotes, the tone is immediately familiar from his Sky Sports commentary work – strident, dogmatic, the plain man's view plainly stressed in a slightly louder voice than everybody else's.

So many times in this book does he say that he "has always been blessed with total self-belief" (or something like it) that you actually begin to question it. Why does he need everyone to be as certain as he is about how certain he is? Would a little doubt bring the whole edifice crashing down?

Or maybe the certainty is there to conceal that he hasn't got anything very interesting to say. He tells us that Boycott was a very selfish player, that Gower was "the most languid of characters" and that Gatting ate a lot of food. Yet again we discover that what you can get away with on telly, in between the ads for beer, may not cut it on the page.

The exception, of course, is the 1981 Ashes series, which is as enthralling as it was in his two previous books, and in the many other books written on the subject. Botham still believes the selectors were wrong to sack him from the captaincy immediately before his great achievements at Headingley.

In fact he believes the selectors were wrong about almost everything, whereas, coincidentally, he was right about almost everything. Even when he was wrong, at least he was decisive in being wrong and showed a lot of "ticker", which would be better than being right in a weak, shilly-shallying way.

Also wrong were the tabloid journalists who wrote lies about him, as well as Imran Khan, Peter Roebuck, the "buffers" brigade at Lord's and other long-standing enemies. Aged 51, and a grandfather, Botham is still fighting these old battles, trying to get his own back on people who did him down years ago. Unfortunately this doesn't leave much room for new material.

There's a new handbags-at-dawn spat with the former Australian captain Ian Chappell, whom Botham says he "flattened" 30 years ago in a bar. Chappell says it's all rubbish. And there's a brand new chapter at the end, in which Botham apologises profusely to his wife and family for having a two-year affair with an Australian waitress, while still somehow managing to imply that it's the press's fault for printing the story.

But an ego this large doesn't have to justify itself to anyone: it just is, and that's enough. Like boors and bullies the world over, Botham loves practical jokes. "I carried on playing such pranks throughout my career; I derived enormous pleasure from them, though I'm not sure if my colleagues always found them as amusing." This book is the latest such prank, and it's likely that anyone who buys it will, in another of his favourite phrases, "fail to see the funny side".

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Re-make/Re-model: Art, Pop, Fashion and the Making of Roxy Music 1953-1972

Michael Bracewell

(Faber, £20)

LUMINESCENT, hieratic, well-nigh hectically engaged, an effervescent palette of commingled styles, borrowing as much from the *faux*-pastiche mockery of Warhol as the workaday enticements of Woolworth, Bryan Ferry's trousers might be thought to symbolise the esoteric plateau between high and low art which the band were adjudged to have colonised with their defiantly contingent sound...

The epochal meeting between Ferry and the group's flamboyant electronic manipulator-cum-strategian Brian Eno is thought to have taken place outside a gentleman's convenience – again, that emblematic link with Duchamp – in Broadwick Street (Ferry remembers it as Soho Square) at 9.15, or possibly 9.23, on the morning of 25 March 1971, a cloudy day of intermittent rain, although the weather forecast was ambiguous.

Ferry remarks: "He was wearing one of those giraffe collars, so high that you couldn't actually see his face. That was very important. And the packet of polo mints. I've always got off on that austere, boreal vibe. Baudrillard, O'Keefe, the Pre-Raphaelites – they came later." A series of entries in Eno's notebook for this period give an indication of the sense of liberation that came in committing himself to this dynamic new aesthetic: "Worryings and scurryings. Bugger, but this music thing is difficult. Short on the bread, too. No fuckin' job, neither. A real bummer... On the other hand, have got in with some nice art school boys who like my shoes. Poptastic, man."

The personnel changes in the initial formation of Roxy have been usefully dated by historians of Roxy Music and their prog rock colleagues Fat Badger and the Exploding Tree Collective. Terry Scrod, drums, left June 1971; Camembert D'Artagnan III, Ferry's old friend from St Cecilia's School of Fine Art and Sofa Testing, joined on guitar, 13 July 1971 ("He had this really amazing sound – like fish humming Mantovani," Eno later recalled), but left three days later; Esme Frink, zither, euphonium and comb-and-paper, "disappeared" (Ferry: "He just went out to buy some fag-papers and we found the zither on the pavement outside the shop – it was really weird") in September 1971.

The *mélange* of influences from which this lambent sextet would derive their aesthetic calling card, the searing procedural crucible in which they were forged, exhibits an almost wanton eclecticism. Indeed Ferry would share with Gilbert and George an enthusiasm for the music hall number "Mind that aspidistra, dearie", an aspect of his musical background which... [*continues for hundreds of pages*]

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ TONY BLAIR's decision to make Hutchinson the British publisher of his memoirs, as part of a transatlantic deal with Random House reportedly worth £5m, is a testament to the strength of his symbiotic friendship with Lord and Lady Gould of Brookwood – aka pollster Philip Gould and Gail Rebuck, UK boss of RH.

For the imprint he's joining has only just published a novel that depicts a Blair-like ex-PM who is on trial for war crimes after conniving in torture, is sleeping with a female aide, has a sinister secret that explains why he's a poodle to US presidents and a wife who beds his ghost-writer. He and Robert Harris could well be the most unlikely of literary stablemates.

■ CALL OFF the Portuguese police – Patricia Cornwell's on the case.

According to the ever-reliable *Daily Star*, the US crime writer has been applying her procedural and investigative experience to the disappearance of Madeleine McCann, and has declared that "Madeleine's mum holds the key to the case".

Seasoned Cornwell-watchers, however, know to take anything she says about real crimes with a pinch of salt. Her 2002 book *Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper – Case Closed* was claimed as conclusive proof that artist Walter Sickert was Jack the Ripper. In his acclaimed 2005 biography of the artist, Matthew Sturgis devoted an appendix to proving rather more conclusively that Cornwell was better off sticking to fiction.

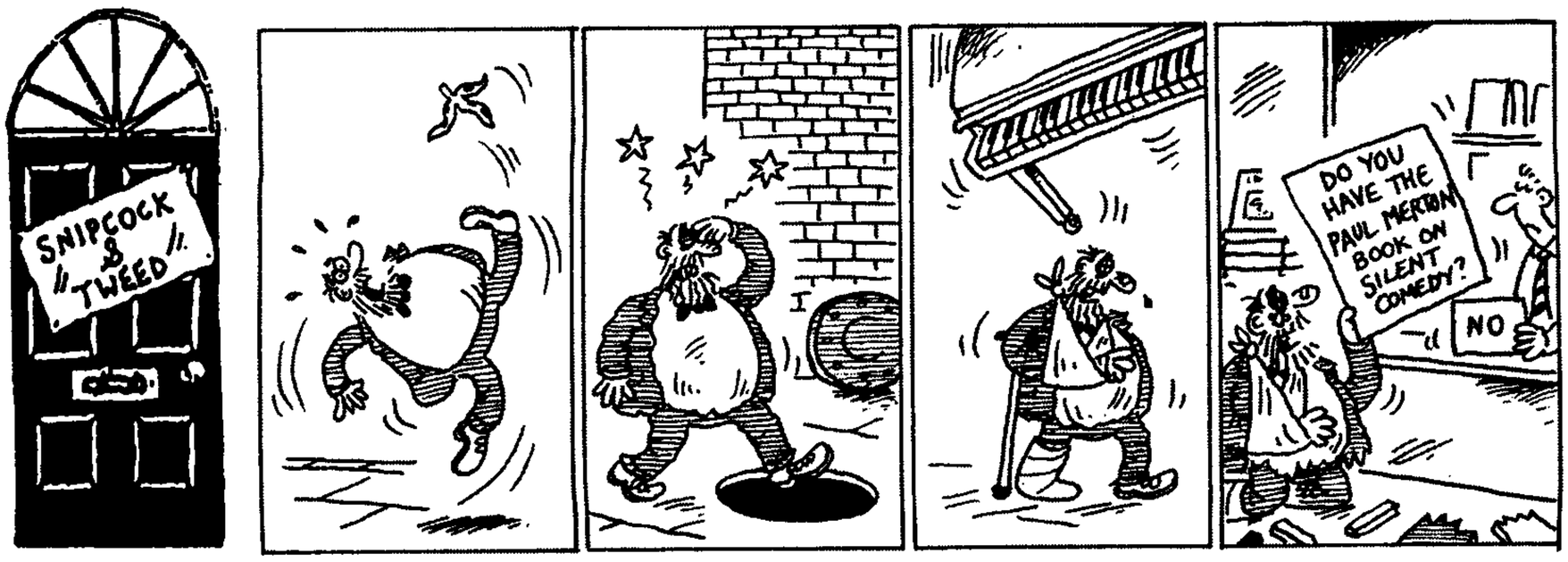
■ THE dust-jacket of Lindy Woodhead's *Shopping, Seduction and Mr Selfridge* quotes a review of her previous book, *War Paint*. "So riveting that it reads like the movie that will surely be made," raved Suzy Menkes in the *International Herald Tribune*.

In the new book, by happy coincidence, a certain Suzy Menkes is thanked in the acknowledgements – and lauded in the text as "the industry's high-priestess of fashion reporting".

By even happier coincidence, last Tuesday's *Herald Tribune* had an ecstatic review of *Shopping, Seduction and Mr Selfridge* by one Suzy Menkes, which began in oddly familiar style: "It could be a movie. It *should* be a movie."

Rolling, rolling, rolling, keep them logs a-rolling...

'Bookworm'



Pseuds Corner

What a pity we cannot let loose Stephen Hawking on the workings of [Lewis] Hamilton's inner universe. Were he able to peer inside the mind of the 22-year-old racing phenomenon the good professor would be sure to determine a universal truth or two that might have application for stress management among mortals.

Hamilton's gaze will fall on nothing but the track in front of him.

He will not waste a second reflecting on what Alonso or Raikkonen might be doing. The ability to filter mental spam is one of Hamilton's key attributes.

KEVIN GARSIDE
Daily Telegraph

It's too early to judge just how clearly [Tom] Yorke is pointing out that we are all artists insofar as we take the inexorable and quite unchosen data of our own circumstances and philosophically internalise them, and give them a significance to match their awful centrality, and thus lend our lives a 'meaning.'

Track ten, 'Videotape', typical neatly strung out Sisyphean sound...*[continues]*

PAUL MORLEY reviews the new Radiohead album, *Guardian* blog

What would be your last meal on earth?

Something very simple. Perhaps a first course of roasted foie gras, eaten out of the pan with some toasted sourdough. Next, seared Scottish scallops sautéed in the best olive oil money can buy and served with sauce vierge... [*continues*]

TOM AIKENS
Guardian Weekend

With some English heritage in her past and her Gulfstream G4SP having a Rolls Royce engine; her Rolls Royce parked nearby; a taste for Aston Martin sports cars and her European flair for entertaining, Stacy says 'I am practically European.'

Interview with US 'entrepreneur, actress and philanthropist' STACY COHEN, *Citywealth*

Yoko : Did you ever hear the story about three pots of plants? Three pots of plants, each watered with certain thoughts: one watered with nothing, just water, the other watered with love and the other with hate. Which do you think grew better?

Beth : Love

Yoko : Well, you think that, don't you? Hate and love was equal, and the one you didn't do anything about died.

YOKO ONO meets BETH DITTO,
Observer Music Monthly

CONTRIBUTORS: Heather Scott, Ben Beer, Fiona Stow, Jason Lofts, Steven Randall.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

THE BOURN PROFLIGACY

Now he's a has-beancounter

THE official explanation concocted for Sir John Bourn's departure from the National Audit Office (NAO) relied on a law that has been on the statute book for just a year.

Under the Companies Act 2006, the NAO will be allowed to audit public limited companies, putting it "under the inspection regime of the Professional Oversight Board of the Financial Reporting Council of which [Bourn] is currently the Chairman". One job had to go and for reasons completely unrelated to the loss of confidence in him as public spending watchdog, it was the NAO one. Sir John will continue with the far lesser part-time job of monitoring the beancounters. Though both the NAO and the POB refused to say how much work he does at the POB and for what reward. So much for open government.

But should he even hold this position?

As the *Eye* has unearthed details of Sir John's extravagance, it has become clear on each occasion that accountancy rules, and in some cases tax rules, have been flouted. The £25,000 a year perks of taking his wife abroad with him were not declared in the accounts as required (even after a whistle-blower had tipped off the NAO's then auditor, Haines Watts), nor were the private use of the chauffeured car, nor the expensive dinners. If they had been, Sir John's conduct might have been picked up a lot earlier.

The NAO's finance department was certainly aware that the travel benefits should have been disclosed: it had arranged for tax payments on the benefit year after year. The affair thus poses serious questions of the accounting, auditing and governance of the NAO, all of which ought to be of interest to the body that still wants Sir John at the top... the Financial Reporting Council!

Eye told you so: how journalism works

THE widespread coverage of Sir John Bourn's departure from the National Audit Office was curiously quiet on one fact: that the comptroller and auditor-general was only forced out after prolonged pressure from *Private Eye* to divulge details of his excesses.

Some papers went further and even took the story as their own. "The head of the National Audit Office faced calls to resign after the *Daily Mail* revealed he had racked up £365,000 in travel expenses and £27,000 in restaurant bills over the last three years," claimed the *Daily Mail* when all it had done was to follow the *Eye*'s original revelations five months ago.

The *Grauniad*, meanwhile, put the departure down to details of Bourn's spending "published in the *Guardian* earlier this month", only acknowledging much later that these emerged "voluntarily, following freedom of information requests from *Private Eye*".

What actually happened was that the *Eye* had been pursuing the information for months through the tortuous freedom of information procedures. When, after dragging its heels for long enough, the NAO saw it would have no alternative but to hand over more on Sir John's junketing, it sportingly gave the information not to the *Eye* hack who had asked for it but to a friendlier journalist on the *Guardian*, and then posted the details on its website.

This, the *Guardian* declared in its front page lead on 11 October, was "an unprecedented move for 'open government'." Yeah, right. The day after being handed its "scoop", the paper duly ran a damage limitation piece sub-titled "Auditor General's expenses seen as blind spot in a respected career". Within days *Guardian* Unlimited editor Emily Bell was reporting that "last week the *Guardian*'s investigative reporter David Hencke turned up an amazing story about the expenses of Sir John Bourn".

When he had to go anyway two weeks later, the *Grauniad* led a profile of Bourn with details of a particularly epicurean week in June this year: on the 11th to Bibendum for lunch and Wiltons for dinner, the next day to the Goring, and so on. *Eye* readers might have found this nauseatingly familiar as it was a repeat of the "week in the life of an auditor general" printed three days earlier on page 27 of the last *Eye*.

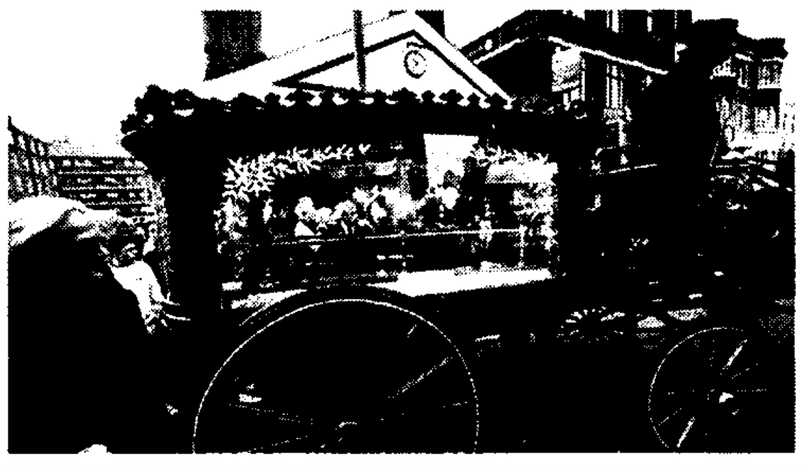
So why did the *Grauniad* and other papers *not* investigate the scandal brewing at the NAO beyond reporting the *Eye*'s exposés? Could the secret lie in the identities of the 160 expensive lunch and dinner guests of Sir John in just three years? At least the *Guardian* has admitted that one of its hacks was among those breaking (very expensive) bread with Sir John.

PS: chronicle of a death foretold...

Sir John Bourn enjoyed the finest food and wine on his travels, but his taste lapsed when he gave a pep talk to NAO managers last year: a long-winded "joke" at the expense of crocodile tamer Steve Irwin, who had just been killed by a stingray. The auditor-general spoke to a series of slides and captions, likening himself to the Australian wrestling a python. Like Irwin, Bourn and his auditors faced "Dangerous predators" and had to avoid becoming "victims of FoI [freedom of information]". How prescient! As the beancounters cringed, up came the picture of a stingray with the caption: "We've not been stung... yet." But the nadir was a slide warning "If we don't maintain trust..." above a photo of a hearse. A P45 might have been more apt.

DANGEROUS PREDATORS

IF WE DON'T MAINTAIN TRUST...



LONDON 2012

Expanding waste lines

IT WILL take more than an outcry over the 2012 Olympics' ever-expanding budget to de-rail the fine dining junketing opportunities for the organisers.

Olympic Delivery Authority deputy chairman Sir Roy McNulty for one has enjoyed some tasty appointments in the last year, including: a meal paid for by the London Development Authority (ie London council taxpayers) at trendy Christopher's in Covent Garden; lunch at the House of Lords from Baroness Valentine, chair of business lobby group London First; and dinner at Claridges courtesy of one of the many consultancy firms sniffing profitably round the Games, Arthur D Little.

He also scoffed a £40 lunch at the National Gallery as a guest of Department of Culture permanent secretary Jonathan Stephens paid for yet again by the taxpayer.

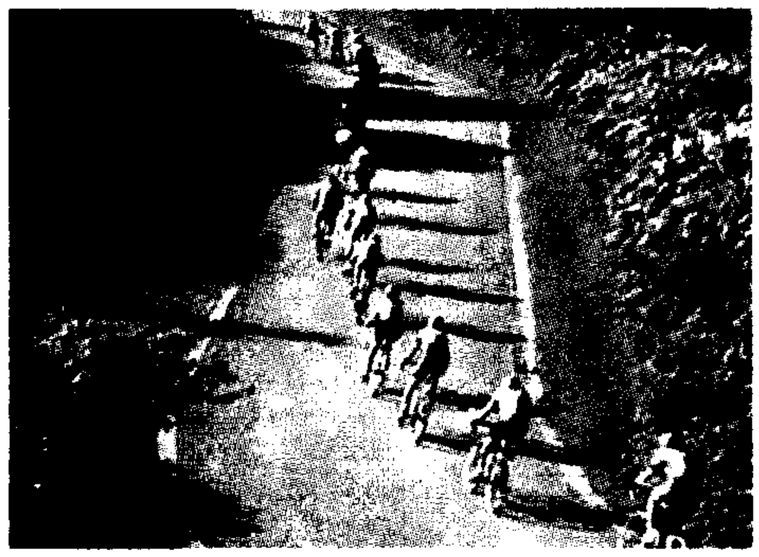
This isn't the only time Stephens has splashed taxpayers' cash on Olympics bosses. In September he got the official chequebook out for an "introductory dinner" with new ODA chairman John Armitt and chief executive David Higgins at top Italian restaurant Quirinale, cost £230. No doubt they resolved to run a tight ship while guzzling on the £14-a-go antipasti.

On their bikes

THREE young cyclists selected for Britain's National Olympic Talent Team are currently training on a school playground because the Olympic Development Agency *still* hasn't replaced the London cycle track it closed a year ago.

The Eastway Cycle Circuit (pictured) closed last November to make way for the Olympic Park in Lee Valley. Cyclists were promised a new home at Hog Hill; but when planning problems emerged there (see *Eye* 1180), they were told a temporary circuit would be made available in Docklands. Hog Hill was supposed to open in April, then in September. The ODA is now talking about opening a small part of the site in March 2008 and the interim circuit never materialised.

Eastway provided cyclists with a traffic-free mile-long road, plus off-road cycling routes, and regularly hosted competitions for all ages and abilities. As the Olympic cycling event itself will see the temporary closure of proper roads, the



"legacy" to the sport will be a tiny "introductory" cycle circuit that isn't even up to international competition standards.

Shot in the foot

ALSO wondering where their Olympic legacy will be are Britain's shooting enthusiasts.

Around £16m is to be spent on a temporary venue at the telegenic Royal Artillery Barracks in Woolwich – a venue that will be pulled down straight after the Games. Community and business groups aren't particularly keen to see so much money spent to briefly bring in a noisy sport then leave them with no new facilities.

Meanwhile not too far from London is the National Shooting Centre at Bisley in Surrey. The National Small-bore Rifle Association says that modernising facilities and adding extra ranges and seating at Bisley could be done for a fraction of the cost and leave the UK with a superb – and permanent – international sports complex. The association's plan even includes car parks which could be used as inline hockey rinks after the Olympics. But the Olympic Organising Committee has already told the *News Shopper* newspaper in Woolwich that the plans "will not change".

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£6bn Budgeted government spending (so far) on 2012 Olympics

£1bn Government spending on all other sport up to 2012

CIVIL SERVICE

Fair shares?

ONE of the country's most senior servants at the heart of government, Gill Rider, clings on to a mammoth financial interest in her previous employer, Accenture, without any concern for the obvious conflict of interest, the *Eye* has discovered.

Rider is in charge of personnel across government and runs the Civil Service Capability Group, responsible for the Cabinet Office's "programme management" work. Many such programmes, often big IT projects, are of course run by… Accenture.

Most recently available statements filed with US financial regulators show Rider owning 700,000 shares in the Bermuda-registered company, each trading at around $40 and putting the value of her holding at around £15m.

No problem, though, in the Cabinet Office's view. It has "well-established procedures to that (*sic*) ensure no conflict of interest exists. If there were such a conflict, the individual concerned would not be playing a role." Except there is a clear conflict in an area where her job description shows she must be playing a role. "Nothing further to add," replied the Cabinet Office.

Similar concerns emerge from the Identity and Passport Service, which has admitted that its boss James Hall retained *his* shareholding in Accenture after leaving the firm for the top job at the IPS a year ago. Accenture, it so happens, is a major player in the business of identity cards, which the IPS is supposed to be delivering.

Documents filed with regulators in the US show that when he was a managing director of Accenture, Hall owned more than 800,000 shares in the Bermuda-registered company, which would now be worth more than £15m.

The IPS insisted that although Hall had owned his shares when the *Eye* first asked – several months after he joined the IPS – this had only been "because at the time there were restrictions on his ability to sell. All the shares have subsequently been sold".

Really? So when did he sell them and what were the restrictions preventing him selling shares that are publicly traded on the New York stock exchange until some time after the *Eye*'s enquiries? Although providing this information could clear up any suspicions, the IPS has refused to since it was "provided in confidence" and constitutes "personal data". Hm. Presumably it's hoping the public will be more forthcoming when asked to provide its "personal data" for identity cards.

FOLLOW-UP...

■ **DISGRACEFUL Deloitte: Last year the *Eye* reported the travails of a Worcestershire businessman David Fabb, whose steel group David Fabb Holdings was brought to its knees by an inaccurate report on its affairs by accountants Deloitte. The beancounters swiftly proceeded to clean up on the group's administration.**

This process had already dragged on over four years (against a standard 18 months) thanks to highly questionable legal claims made by Deloitte against Fabb and another of his companies, CKE Engineering. This firm was scuppered as a result with the loss of 100 manufacturing jobs.

Now the claim against CKE – the largest and, as reported in *Eye* 1157, always baseless – has predictably collapsed. Too late for CKE, Fabb and 100 steel workers, but no skin off Deloitte's nose. Up to May this year the firm had claimed administration fees of £3.6m, £300,000 in the last year.

Yet so far Fabb has had no joy with his calls for an investigation from the Deloitte-friendly DTI (now the Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and host to eight secondees from the accountancy firm). Even a direct appeal to Deloitte old boy and new trade minister Digby, Lord Jones of Birmingham has fallen on deaf ears. Mr Fabb, 75, remains committed to fighting Deloitte single-handedly to the intense irritation of the firm and its army of lawyers.

A fat lot of good for Scotland

WHERE is Gordon Brown getting the figures that allowed him to claim that "there are more school playing fields now" during his speech on obesity at Harris Girls' Academy last month? Certainly not in Scotland.

"Overall, the figures should be considered positive," claimed "Sportscotland" (*sic*), putting an astonishing spin on the loss of 15 sports pitches in the country in the first quarter of 2007. That's a rate of 60 pitches disappearing every year in one of the most unfit areas of the developed world.

The figures released last month show that from January to March a total of 32 planning applications resulted in sports pitches being lost, mainly due to school rebuilding or reorganisation. Just 17 new pitches were granted permission, some as part of replacement deals. Some areas did particularly badly, with East Dunbartonshire suffering a net loss of eight pitches as two large school sites became residential developments.

Playing fields campaigners at Fields in Trust said the reality was even worse, as Sportscotland only counts losses of "0.4 hectares or more for any pitch sports", meaning that tennis courts and informal play areas aren't even recorded.

So how can Sportscotland celebrate such figures? It is the statutory consultee on all applications relating to playing fields, but (just as with Sport England) its remit is only to promote "proper" sport. Hence big grass fields suitable for casual exercise of all kinds can be cheerfully sacrificed for fewer, smaller synthetic pitches – and never mind the disappearance of green spaces in crowded urban areas.

NB: Brown couldn't have got his figures from England either. Although the government claims a net gain of 35 playing fields over two years, that barely begins to restore the number lost. According to former Sports Minister Richard Caborn: "At its peak, about 40 were sold a month."

Jack Brown's injuries

JUSTICE

Hostile witness?

FOUR years ago Jack Brown needed 600 stitches in his face and neck after he was the victim of a frenzied glass attack. He is now disfigured, suffers post traumatic stress, still needs medication and is unable to work as a specialist theatre decorator.

Ross Hadleigh, his former neighbour who inflicted the wounds in 2003, was never brought to trial, however. Although police noted that Mr Brown was "lucky to be alive", they initially believed Hadleigh to be an "elderly" man with a "terminal" brain tumour who only had a few months to live and so would not make it to a trial.

In fact in January last year Hadleigh, aged 46, was jailed for a subsequent crime: beating another neighbour over the head with a home-made cosh embedded with screws and bolts and decorated with swastikas. His trial heard that he had suffered a brain tumour which was operated on in 2002, but there was no evidence of any recurrence.

Hadleigh, it emerged, also had two previous convictions for two other assaults in 1986 and 1992, when he also struck a lodger with a weapon causing head injuries – neither of which seems to have been picked up by Sussex police who were called to the block of flats in Eastbourne, in February 2003, where they found Hadleigh astride Brown's bloodied and prone body.

Then it seems the police were happy to accept Hadleigh's suggestion that he was acting in self defence after Mr Brown broke into the flats. But that too seems extraordinary. For Hadleigh had only a small bite mark on his hand, inflicted as Mr Brown tried to stop Hadleigh slitting his throat from behind. Mr Brown's extensive injuries, by comparison, were potentially life threatening and his blood was spattered down the stairs and pooled in three separate places.

Mr Brown admitted breaking the glass on the front door of the flats in an attempt to retrieve his dog, which was locked in a friend's flat. He had argued with the friend that day and was banging on his door when he says he was attacked from behind and thrown down the stairs. There, he says, Hadleigh grabbed some of the glass and slashed at his face, slicing his throat and stabbing his neck.

It appears police did not carry out any kind of forensic examination of the scene; did not take photographs of Mr Brown's injuries; did not take a statement from the officer who attended the scene and, according to Mr Brown, who removed a shard of glass from his neck. And although police did take his bloodied clothing, this was later destroyed.

Instead they appear to have accepted Hadleigh's claim that Brown was the drunken aggressor, and that of Brown's friend who was said to have told police that Brown had assaulted him earlier in the evening but that that he did not want to pursue charges. Mr Brown emphatically denies both claims, and had police bothered to check Hadleigh's record for violence, they might not have given him so much credibility as a witness.

As Mr Brown's solicitor, Darren White, told the *Eye*: "Given Mr Brown's injuries, it appears unlikely that a jury would have accepted that Mr Hadleigh acted in reasonable self defence. I believe that had this case gone to trial, it is more than likely that Mr Hadleigh would have been convicted."

However, efforts by Mr Brown to force the CPS to bring charges failed last month after a high court judge refused leave for a judicial review. Brown's statement recorded by police immediately after the attack when he was receiving treatment in hospital, was said to differ from that given later when he admitted that he had broken the door. Initially he claimed he was dragged through the door and later admitted breaking it with a drainage cover. But Mr Brown has never been able to obtain a copy of this initial statement, nor indeed the full police file on the affair. He claims that neither was he in a fit state to give any coherent account of the trauma he had suffered. Mr Brown has now also filed a complaint to Sussex police alleging serious failures in the investigation. He had to appeal via the local paper for witnesses and search for them himself. But he has now been told he is three months out of time to file a complaint. His solicitor is about to seek another judicial review.

POLICE 5

Untouchable

LITTLE surprise that the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) could find no evidence to substantiate supergrass claims that the Stephen Lawrence murder inquiry had been hampered a corrupt officer.

The IPCC last month dismissed allegations from former copper Neil Putnam that Det Sgt John Davidson received money from the notorious south London criminal Clifford Norris, whose son David was one of the murder suspects (*Eyes passim*).

Putnam says that he had informed officers from the Yard's "Untouchables", the anti-corruption squad, and was surprised that he was never called to give evidence at the Lawrence inquiry.

Davidson always denied the allegation, along with others suggesting that he was involved in handling stolen goods and drugs. But if he wasn't corrupt, he was grossly incompetent.

Eye readers may recall how on the day after Stephen was stabbed to death in south London, a young skinhead called "James Grant" went into nearby Eltham police station and named David Norris as one of three of Stephen's killers. Bizarrely he was sent away and not interviewed until 24 hours later by Davidson, who wrote notes on a "docket" which mysteriously went missing.

Grant later told Kent police who were investigating the affair that he had given Davidson the name of his "source" and other vital information – leads that were not followed up. Davidson denied Grant had ever named the "source".

Davidson also told the Macpherson inquiry that he couldn't remember if he had ever bothered to speak to another potentially crucial witness, known as "K", who had visited the home of two other suspects on the night of the killing. This apparent failure to follow up leads in the crucial hours following a crime came, remember, from a detective with 25 years' experience.

So corrupt or bungling, he was a useful man for any culprit to have on the murder investigation team. Which rather undermines the Met's angry attack, following the IPCC ruling, on the BBC which, like the *Eye* and the *Guardian*, had aired Putnam's allegations.

NUTRITION

May contain nuts...

WHO is Patrick Holford, the British media's favourite "nutritionist"? And how did he become part of an alliance between noisy rich world cranks and abysmal poor world regimes which may be doing more damage to Africa than all the institutions of the global market rolled into one?

Holford (pictured) has come as close to saying he is an Aids denialist as it is possible to be without announcing it loud and proud. When David Colquhoun of University College London wrote in the *Guardian* this summer about Holford's "truly scary" claim that vitamin C is better at treating Aids than conventional drugs, Holford issued what journalists call a non-denial denial.

The claim that vitamin C was some kind of magical cure-all was not "his own invention", he replied. All he had done was "report on published trials that show that vitamin C outperforms AZT in in-vitro trials and that is a good basis for human trials to be carried out".

Holford appeared the sober scientist in every respect but one: there are no scientifically reputable trials. As Professor Nigel Rollins, a World Health Organisation official in Aids-ridden South Africa, said, there is "no substantiated evidence that a single vitamin reduces the viral load of people living with HIV". All Holford had done, in fact, was cite tests by one Raxit Jariwalla who put cells in a dish and treated them with AZT and vitamin C.

Jariwalla is a member of the South African Rath Foundation which encouraged people with HIV to abandon their medication in favour of his vitamins. Its patron was the late Linus Pauling, a once great scientist who ended his life making nutty claims that vitamin C could treat the common cold and cancer. As it happens, Pauling was also a patron of Holford's Institute for Optimum Nutrition.

All rather complicated, you might think. But the simple message that governments don't need to spend money on Aids has found a grateful audience among the African nationalist elites who want to believe that white pharmaceutical companies are conning them. It took doctors until 2006 to persuade Thabo Mbeki, South Africa's dunderheaded president, to support the distribution of anti-Aids drugs. Many in his ANC still cling to the old conspiracy theory.

In Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe has proclaimed that Aids is the result of poverty, not HIV. In Muslim Africa, Aids is dismissed as God's punishment of homosexuals. In India, China and Vietnam doctors accuse their governments of failing to acknowledge the scale of the public health crisis. In other words, there are plenty of powerful people willing to grasp at the straws offered by Holford and his friends.

You can't blame them. Holford is derided by science bloggers, most notably the authors of the punchy HolfordWatch site, but foreigners trawling the British press cuttings would find him popping up as an expert witness more often than Posh Spice at London Fashion Week.

When the *Daily Star* decided to help "32DD beauty" Dani Lloyd loose weight, it called in Holford. When the *Mail* wanted a miracle cure for low education standards, Holford told it that "children who eat good fats, from raw nuts, seeds and oily fish, double their chances of high performance". Further upmarket, the *Guardian* foodie Joanna Blythman reported his arguments against putting folic acid supplements in bread as if they were the serious reservations of an acknowledged specialist, while the *Independent* described him as "one of the world's leading authorities on new approaches to health and nutrition".

But it's not just the hacks. The University of Bedfordshire endorsed a degree course run by his Institute of Optimum Nutrition and the University of Teesside recruited him to a project to get teenagers off Ritalin.

No one would guess from the deferential coverage that there is no regulation of the nutritional therapy business in Britain. Practitioners can drop heavy hints that their vitamin supplements can deal with everything from arthritis to autism without the authorities questioning their credentials.

In Holford's case it turns out he has a degree in experimental psychology, not medicine. True, he also has an "honorary diploma in nutritional therapy", but as it is from the institute he founded, the accolade is less impressive than it sounds.

As his ideas spread round the world, when will journalists and university vice chancellors finally ask him some hard questions?

'Ratbiter'

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

THE uproar over the Treasury's proposed 80 percent rise in capital gains tax – by cutting capital gains tax to a flat 18 percent but ending taper relief at 10 percent – overlooks a very valuable tax break which Chancellor Alistair Darling has left untouched.

The change announced last month is forecast to hit not just entrepreneurs and small business owners but also the Alternative Investment Market (AIM), which has been a great City success story of the past decade. But while capital gains tax would in effect jump next April from 10 percent to 18 percent for those selling AIM-listed shares in their companies, the 100 percent inheritance tax relief available on AIM-listed shares held more than two years has been left untouched.

This loophole has become a significant driver of AIM business in recent years as brokers and accountants have offered to create AIM-only portfolios which completely avoid IHT at 40 percent. That perk will still be available to boost the buying of AIM-listed shares. Institutional investors are the main influence on AIM and are unlikely to be affected/discouraged by the proposed tax changes. But the impact of the IHT investors could also now become more important.

This IHT tax break is potentially worth considerably more to investors, especially those families controlling AIM-listed companies, than the saving even from the old taper relief regime. So much so that some City experts had been expecting a closing of the AIM loophole in the last budget. The reason being that this was not why the Treasury had originally allowed AIM-listed shares to be treated so generously. The initial motivation was to encourage investment in small or start-up UK companies, not to save inheritance tax for the wealthy or encourage investment in foreign companies.

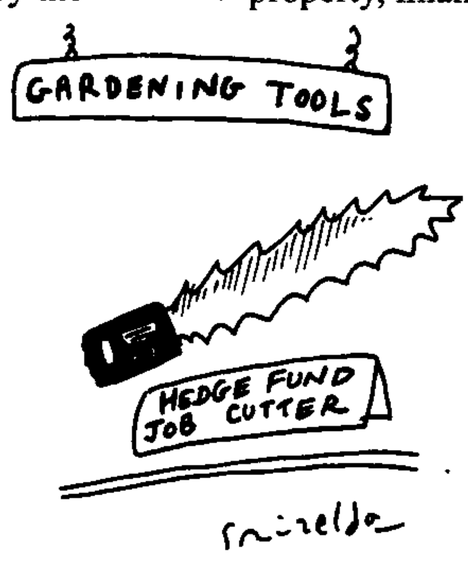
The number of UK companies listed on AIM has doubled since 2002 to more than 1,300. There has been even greater growth in overseas registered companies from 50 to over 300. The combined market value in September was more than £100bn – ten times the figure in 2002. Turnover in that period has gone from £3.5bn to £58bn last year and almost as much in the first nine months of this year. That is a lot of potential tax lost by the Treasury in taper and IHT relief.

The AIM anomaly comes about because it is not a "recognized stock exchange" as far as Revenue & Customs is concerned – unlike the main London Stock Exchange of which it is part. As a result, AIM companies are considered "unlisted" for tax purposes even though the shares are dealt on an official stock market. And shares in unlisted companies qualify as a business property asset and are available both for taper and IHT relief. After two years that means a maximum 10 percent payment on sale or no IHT liability.

That tax break enables investors to stash away minimum amounts of £30,000 to £100,000 up to £1m or more in portfolios of only AIM-listed shares. The whole portfolio can in this way be taken out of the IHT net. This has become big fee earning business with more City firms offering the services in the past two years. One tactic is for investors to borrow six figures against their home and invest the cash raised in AIM shares so creating a "double-bubble" for reducing IHT liability – the loan reduces the value of the home for IHT purposes and the shares are outside IHT anyway.

The downside is the risk that the shares will tank, thereby making inheritance tax a painful irrelevancy. But they have to fall by more than 40 percent before the loss is less painful than the slice taken by the taxman. But AIM is volatile. The FT-AIM index is still two-thirds below its 2000 peak, unlike the FT-100 which recovered those losses. However, the AIM market has shown growth since 2003.

Not all AIM-listed companies are eligible for the IHT relief. Non-trading companies like property, finance and mining are generally excluded. But that leaves a lot in, including possibly non-UK companies which have found a profitable home on AIM. Ironically many of those are based in tax havens such as the Channel Islands, Isle of Man and the British Virgin Islands. Others are from China, Israel or other countries and bring no employment or investment benefit to the UK. It is hard to imagine this is what the Treasury had in mind.



The same tax exemptions also apply to AIM's ambitious rival, the PLUS market. However, now that PLUS has acquired "recognized investment exchange" status from the Fundamentally Supine Authority as well as "recognized stock exchange" status from HMRC, there are those who wonder whether the taxman will look more closely at those small companies listed on PLUS as well as AIM.

PLUS says it has ringfenced these small companies on its "PLUS-quoted" market from the new "PLUS-listed" market it is creating to challenge the LSE and so they will not lose their valuable tax breaks.

But all the activity on AIM, the growing number of foreign listings and the thought that there may be AIM abuse could make the Treasury look again at the IHT loophole – especially at a time when it needs to boost tax revenues and has proposed to effectively double the threshold at which inheritance tax applies.

GOOD to see the Bank of England is taking care of the at least £18bn (and counting) that it has poured into Northern Wreck to keep the sinking building society afloat.

Last month the Bank registered a debenture on the mortgage loans and underlying properties, cash and other assets, providing in effect first call on everything Northern Wreck owns where there is not a pre-existing preferential claim. The debenture agreement dated 9 October succeeded and enhanced the Bank's security for the loan facility initially agreed on 14 September as queues formed round the block outside Northern Wreck offices.

Prior to the debenture the bank had been content with a deed of charge. But that was when the assumption was that the £3bn facility might not be used given the public government guarantee to depositors. But almost two months later depositors seem to have voted with their feet and removed at least £10bn while commercial lenders do not want to know Northern Wreck so are not renewing their short-term loans.

This leaves the unhappy Bank of England as indeed the lender of last resort facing a bill that could climb as far as £30bn. Exactly how it gets that money back – given that any purchaser of Northern Wreck is certain to want to keep all or part of that loan if at all possible – remains to be seen by February next year, the date the Treasury has set by when there has to be an answer.

BANKING analyst John-Paul Crutchley of Merrill Lynch was a consistent rooter for Northern Wreck all the way down this year. He tipped the shares as a "buy' three times in April (at over £10), June (at over £8) and August (at over £6) as the price relentlessly fell on fears about its exposure to the money markets for 75 percent of its mortgage funding.

Crutchley and fellow analyst Manus Costello declared the company was "trading normally" and had "access to funding' as late as 16 August as the credit crunch began to bite and Northern Wreck started looking for help. Crutchley still called the shares a "hold" on the morning of 14 September when Northern Wreck announced that it had had to be rescued by the Bank of England. Crutchley bravely announced he was still sticking to his price target of 913p. The shares closed that day at 438p.

"We think that the game is over for Northern Rock in its present form," Crutchley told clients the following Monday. The price collapsed to 282p that day. It is now 160p.

However, it is not all bad news for Merrill Lynch, even if clients who took their advice might feel a little burned. Merrill quickly became appointed adviser to Northern Wreck and is helping find a buyer for the broken company. Such support in the face of challenge from Merrill Lynch's independent analysts was of no help in influencing that choice. After all, research departments are independent of corporate finance departments.

Doubtless the multi-million fees Merrill Lynch earns as adviser and joint broker will assuage embarrassment over its analysts' misplaced confidence, even if any takeover is likely to leave any clients who are still Northern Wreck shareholders with little or nothing. But then shares can go down as well up!

THE phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed continues to be unable to make money at his Ritz Hotel in Paris, the current focus of the Diana/Dodi inquest. But at least latest results for the hotel show that the loss was halved from €5.9m (£4.1m) to €2.8m (£1.9m) in the year to December 2006.

Part of the loss is accounted for by the amounts incurred in legal costs by the hotel which no doubt include its lawyers fees related

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– Northern Rock letter to a customer borrowing £5,000, 1 November 2007

"Northern Rock's borrowing from the Bank of England has hit £23bn, growing by £2.2bn in the past week."

– Daily Telegraph, 2 November 2007

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to the inquest where it is represented. The accounts show that the hotel has provided €3m to cover the cost of litigation involving "employees and third parties". This provision is similar to the figure in 2005 but compares with some €800,000 at the beginning of 2001. More than €1.2m was provided during 2006 and €1.35m in 2005.

The Ritz owes €109m (£75m) due to be repaid to Royal Bank of Scotland in May 2009. Fayed is expected to seek to refinance that loan along with the cost of a proposed renovation before the 2009 deadline. Meanwhile his offshore companies have given assurances of continued support from their unspecified resources, so that's all right then.

PLANET FOOTBALL

Coventry City

LABOUR MP and close friend of Gordon Brown, Geoffrey Robinson faces troubled times off the pitch at the championship club, despite its current good footballing form.

A proposed US takeover bid fell through last month and the 2006 accounts are more than six months overdue – a Companies Act offence which could bring a Robinson prosecution as director/chairman. The company also appears to be at risk of collapse with debts in May 2005 of £25m which may now be nearer £40m with the taxman a large creditor.

The club's major offshore shareholder Craigavon assumed a £10m bank loan last year and is still owed more than £5m due next year. Craigavon, registered in the BVI but run from Guernsey, has in the past been linked to a Robinson offshore discretionary family trust, but he disclosed no interest in the club's shares in the 2005 accounts. Robinson and two other director/shareholders, including "Mr Corporate Governance", Sir Derek Higgs, have loaned the club another £2m also due next year. Robinson has also given a guarantee to the club's bankers, the Co-Op Bank, for up to £6m.

The Sky Blues' position has not been improved by selling its ground and becoming a tenant at the new Ricoh stadium, which is owned jointly by the city council and a Higgs family charity. Arena Coventry borrowed £22m to finance the purchase of the lease on the stadium so has its own problems.

But in July the club's shareholders approved the assignment of a buy-back option in Football Investors, the company which owns the non-council half share in the stadium, to Robinson for no cash consideration. Just why that deal was done – other than perhaps because of pressure from Craigavon or that the club could not afford to take up the option – is unclear. Also unclear is whether the transfer of that option has yet been agreed by the Higgs charity which controls Football Investors. However, it does leave Robinson with a potential interest in the stadium if the club collapses into administration. The only alternative could be a possible take-over bid from former footballer turned financier Roy Ranson, but Robinson is said to oppose that bid.

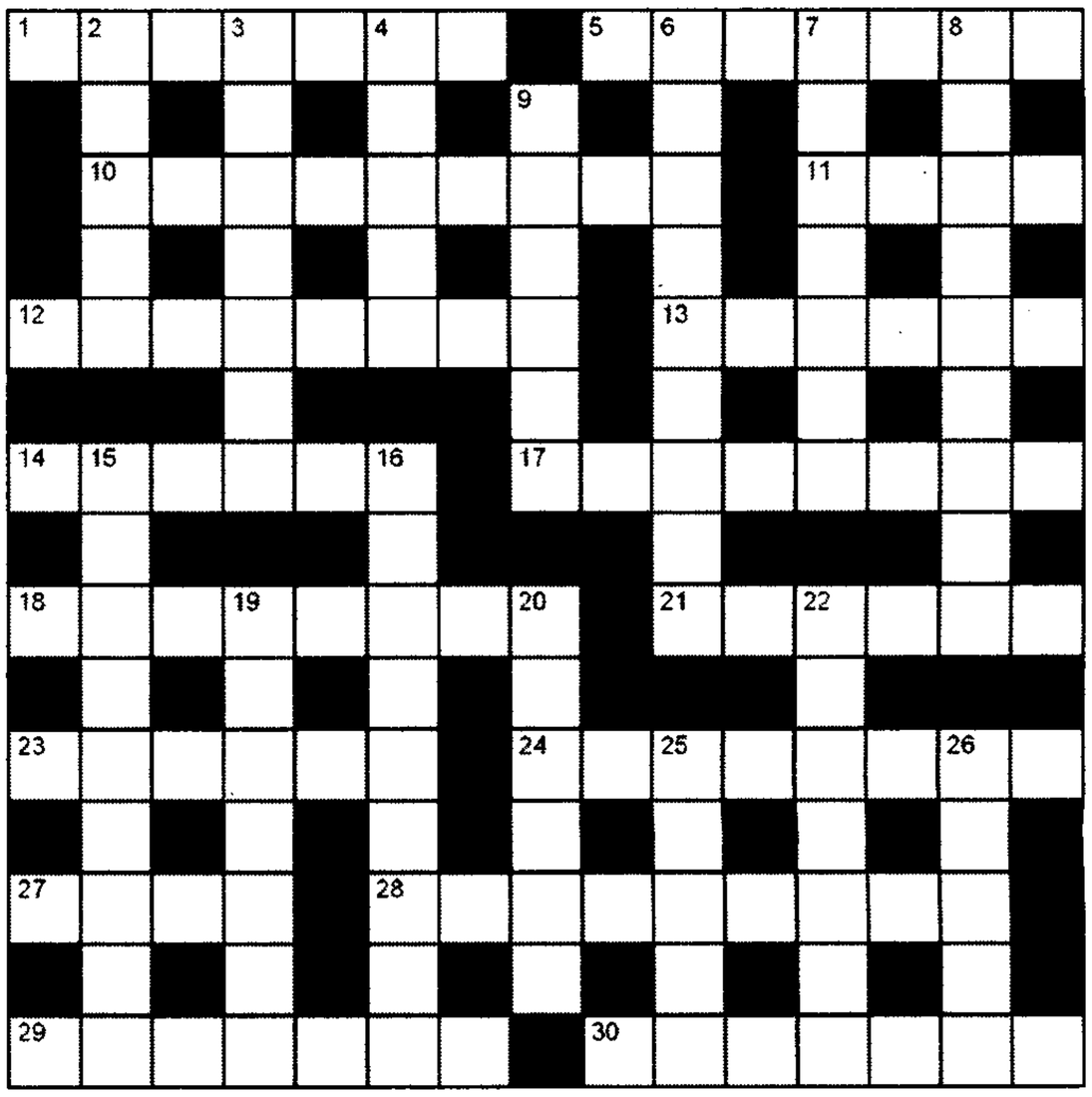
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 352

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 16 November 2007

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Filth, sex and unknown quantity of vulgarity (7)
5 One sort of relief worker on duty (4,3)
10/7/18 Complaint of our schoolkids: "Crap air-conditioners fitted" – heads of 'Developmental Training and Encouragement' brought in at intervals (9,7,8)
11 Fumble heartless Sir John (4)
12 Taking-off point of DNA tests ballsed up (8)
13 Bend on colon removed (not hip) (6)
14 Ring dropping out spoilt tosser's highlight (6)
17 It's a hard thing, changing political bias in voting process (8)
18 See 10ac.
21 Crew wanting Midge's shit put to productive use (6)
23 Johnny's trick taking 1960s teenager aback (6)
24 Gets an erection when corporation sees about securing leader of Conservatives (8)
27 Observer has trouble with this piece from busty Eve (4)
28 Junkie has to swipe loaf (5-4)
29 Promote revolting former BBC head? (7)
30 Speaking rhetorically, there's sod all right with a Conservative! (7)

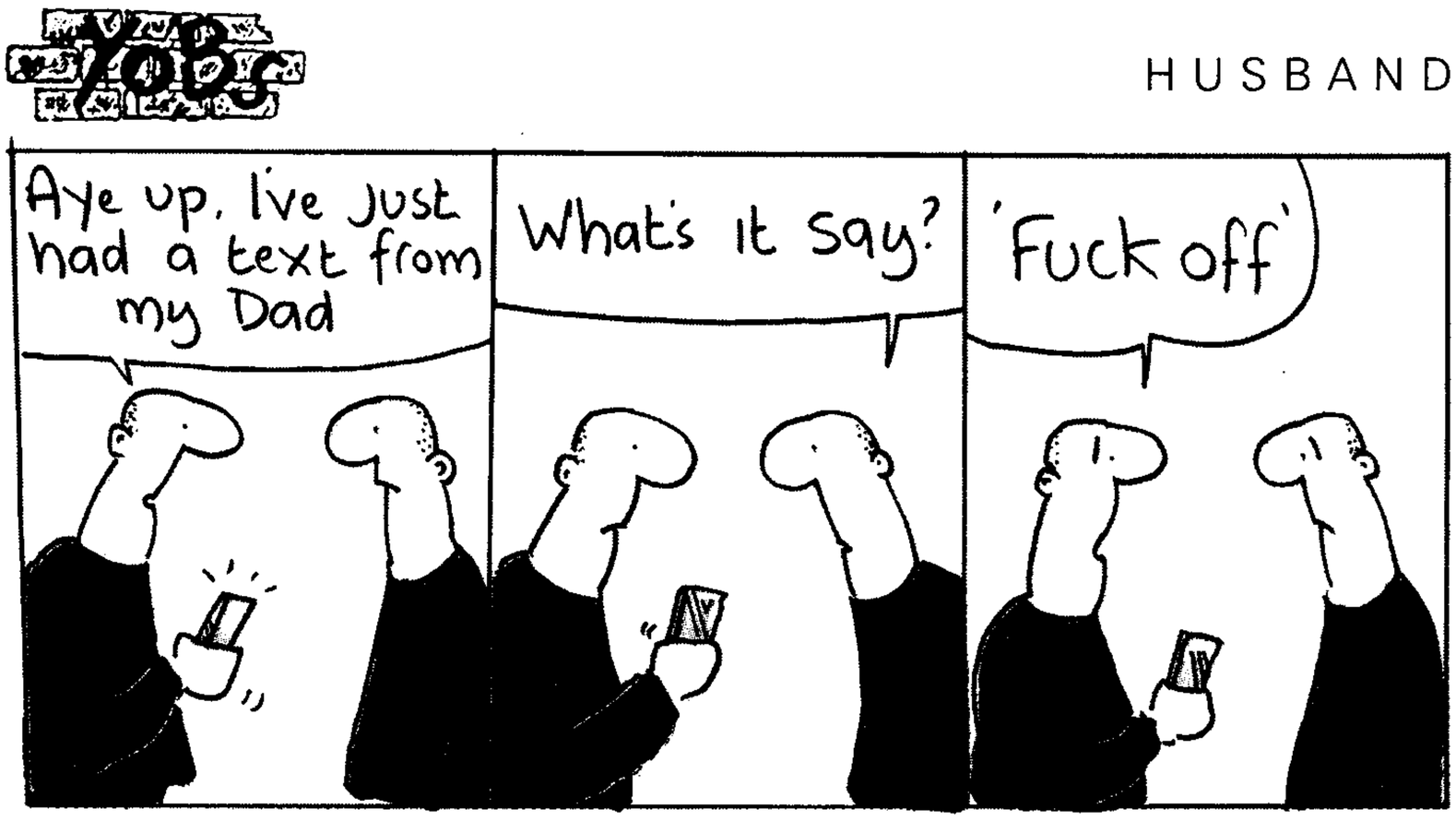
DOWN

2 Brenda's had a turn – be a luvvy and show you're aware (5)
3 Lessening of tension when comedian introduces a bit of camp (7)
4 Maxim Brown's new number on film (5)
6 Sauna made pear-shaped to a disgusting extent (2,7)
7 See 10ac.
8 Blue sick (3,6)
9 Parking scam fellow goes for a piss (6)
15 Hint: no jiggling chest, producing much less of a shock (4,2,3)
16 Given a stern seeing-to (9)
19 Mature female's kinky dildo: "One's missing organ" (3,4)
20 Desert rabbit gets put up arse (6)
22 Objection to Labour's laid-back response? (2,5)
25 One producing indicator: "Right is redundant!" (5)
26 Start to wank off metalworker (senior) (5)

Crossword 351 winner: CATH GILBEY

ACROSS: 8 Warble 9 Up in arms 10 Abundance 12 Bantu 13 Big jobs 15 Hard-hit 17 Nipple count 21 Eardrum 23 Johnson 24 Lehar 26 Pinpricks 28 Swelling 29 Idling.

DOWN: 1 Swear by 2 Urdu 3 Clodhopper 4 Speech 5 Knob 6 Bronchitis 7 Asquith 11 Nasal 14 Gonorrhoea 16 Rough trade 18 Cajun 19 Legless 20 Inn sign 22 Moping 25 Rile 27 Chit.



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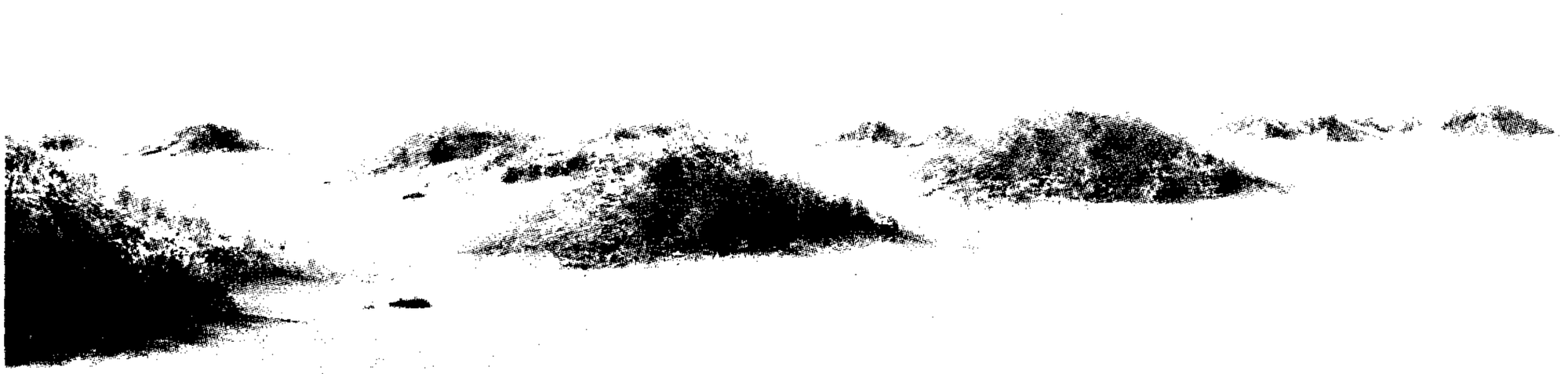

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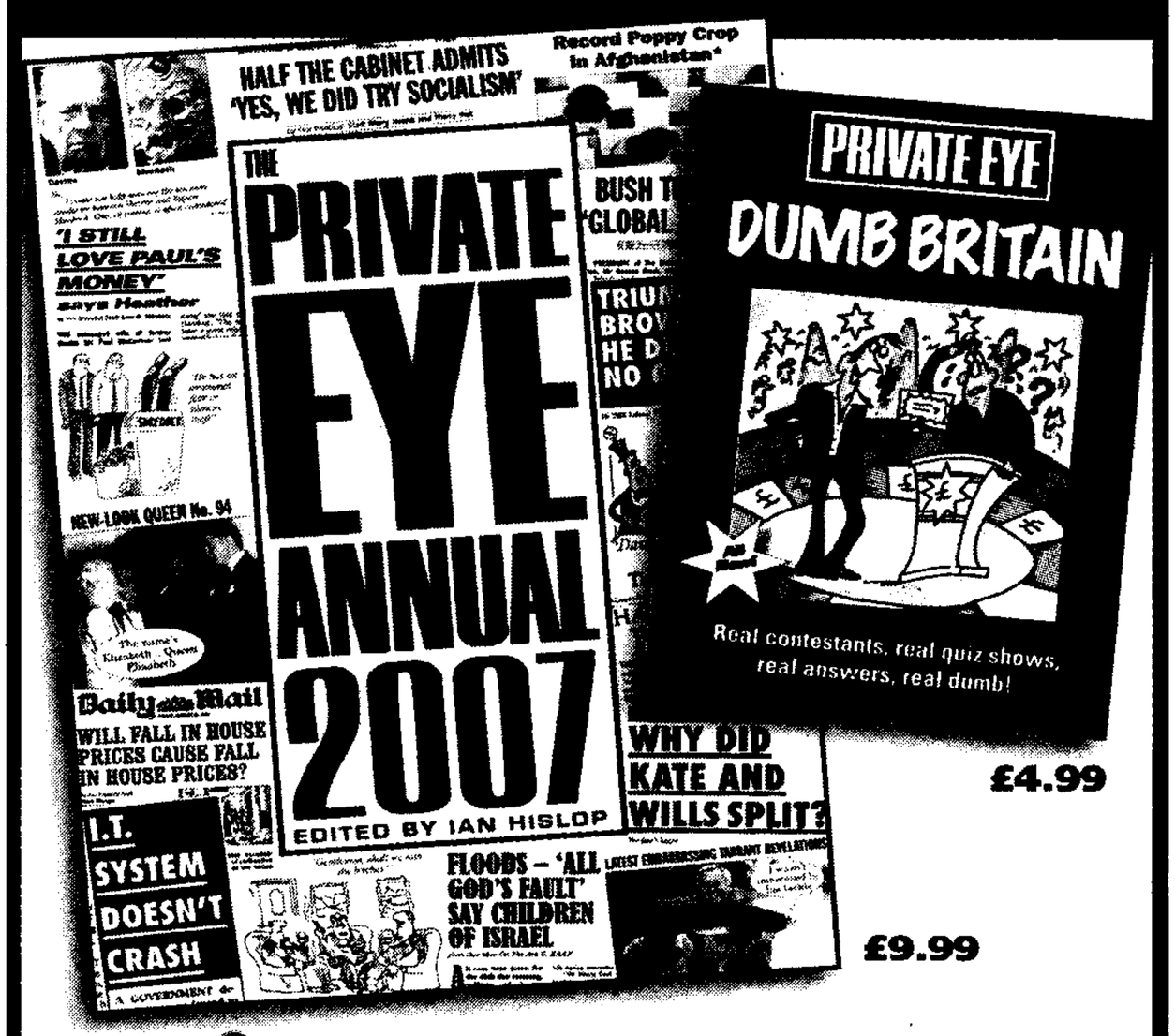
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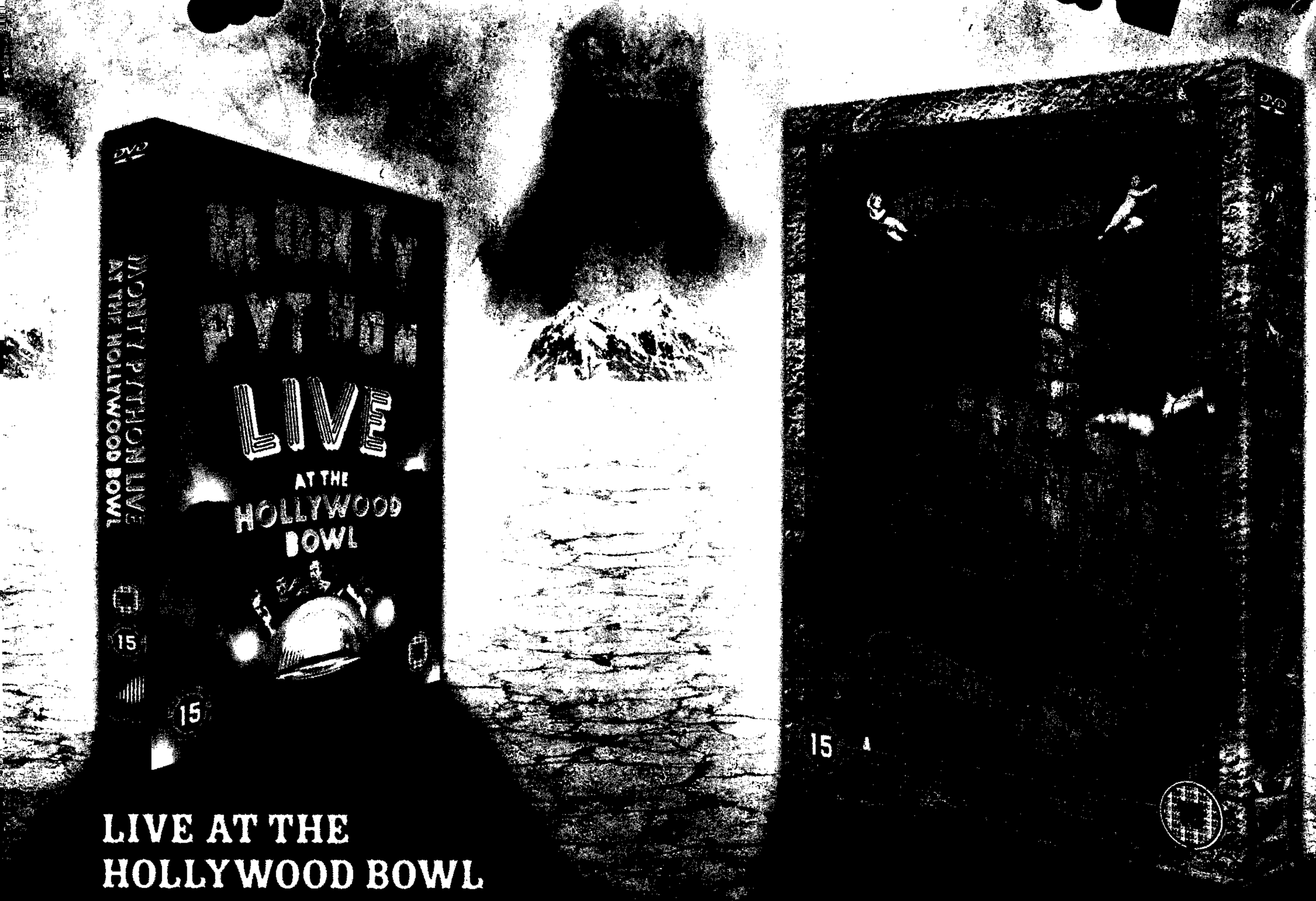

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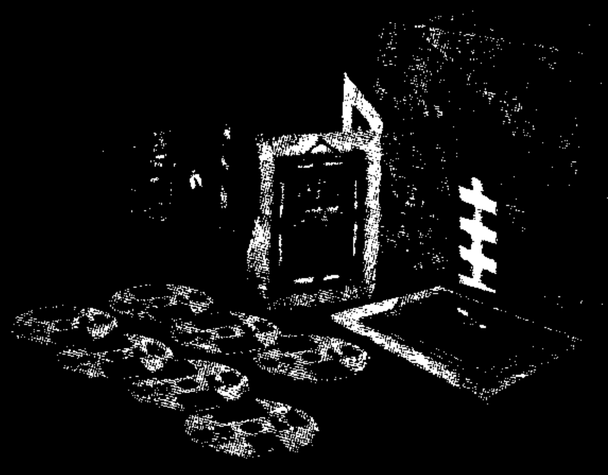

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OLD AGA DIED. Need new one or will freeze this winter. Warm thanks. S/C: 30-84-57. A/C: 12595860.

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DREAMED OF NEW LIFE afloat on barge, boyfriend has left me high and dry. Still loving France, need help with starting up costs. Any help would be appreciated. S/C: 30-92-45. A/C: 02805483.

NO MONEY, KITCHEN, heating, husband, four children. Help. S/C: 11-13-66. A/C: 00059401.

WOOF! £1500+ costs to rescue stray puppy from Greece. Contributions humbly sought. For info, photos, name suggestions: savethepupsavetheworld@yahoo.co.uk S/C: 11-08-19. A/C: 01054265.

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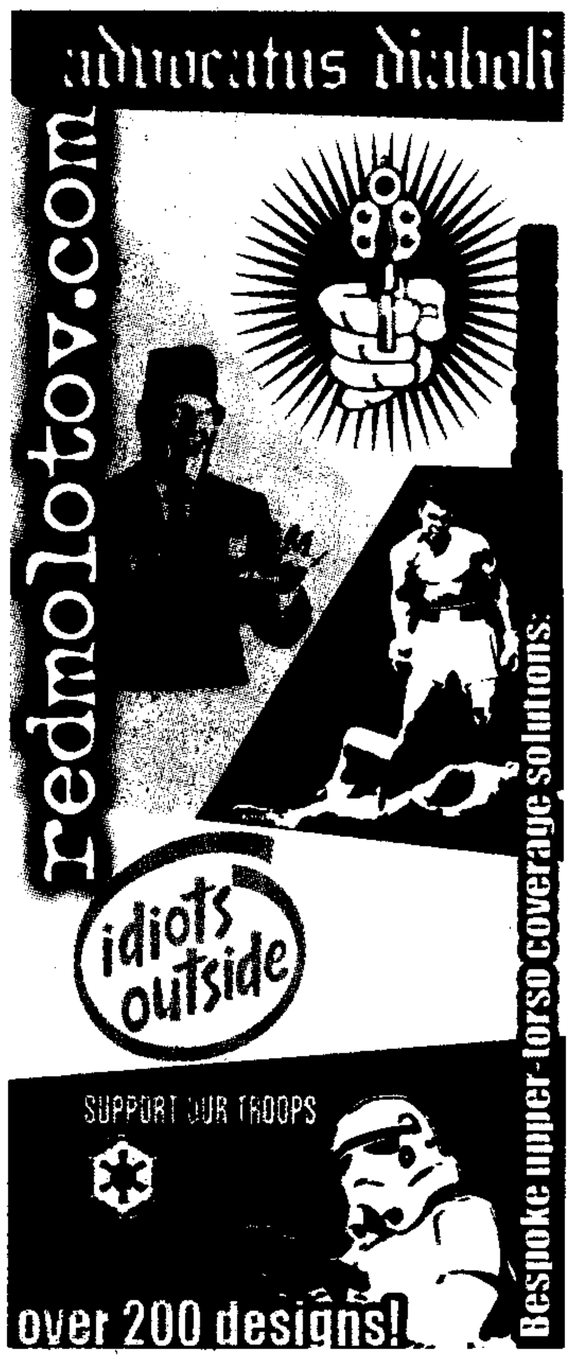

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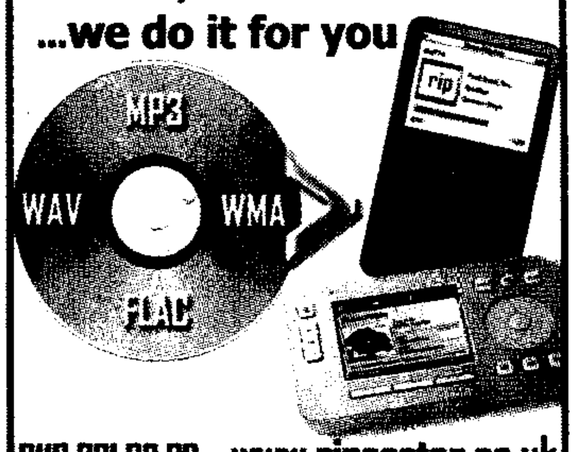

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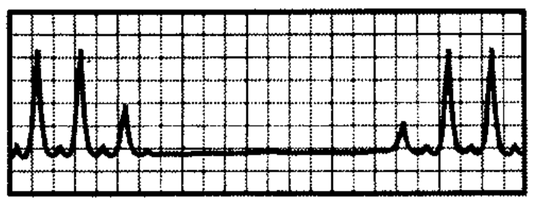

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Ragdoll

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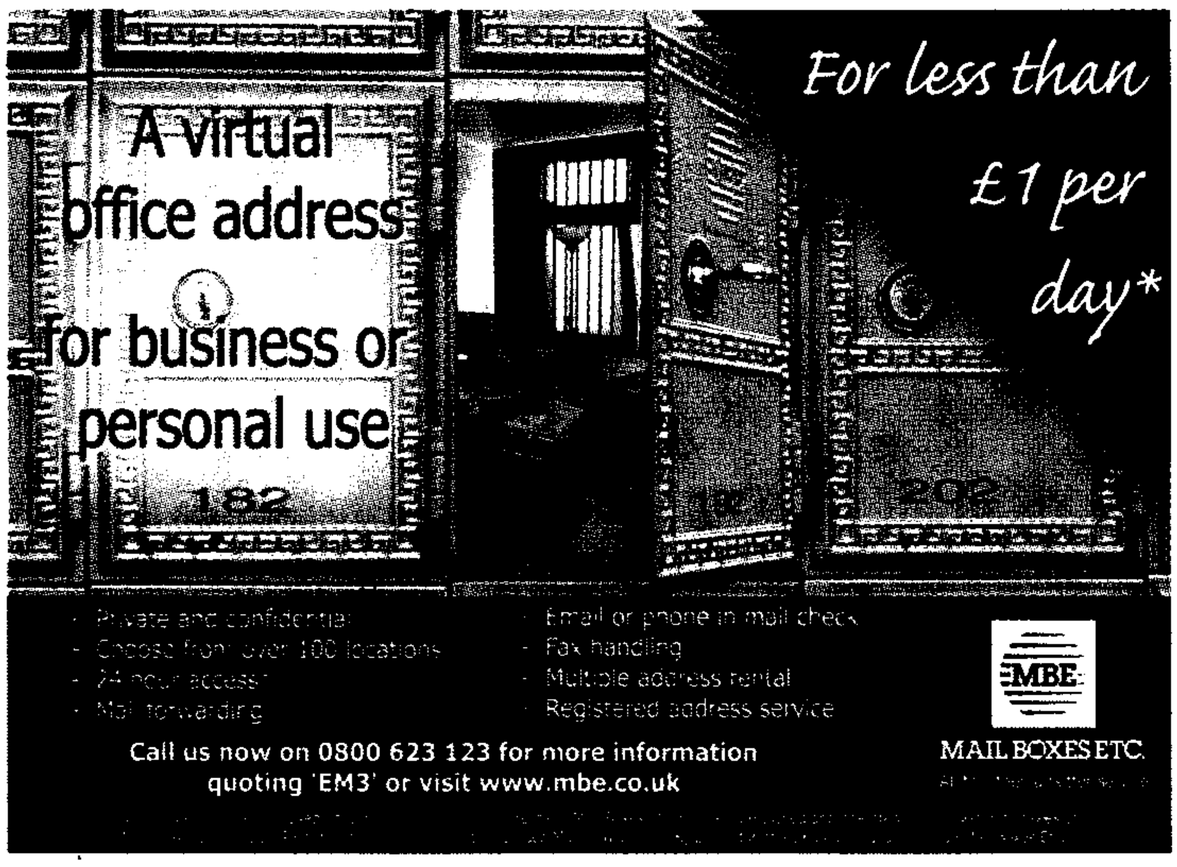
We are seeking a comedy writer able to contribute to a fantasy format for 6-7 year olds. This will appeal widely to children all over the contemporary world.

For a writer, young or old, not afraid of such a challenge there is huge potential.

To be considered, surprise us in no more than 500 words (with or without illustrations) with what you think a character led fantasy for children of around 7 years might be.

Please email Chris Wood at **talent@ragdoll.co.uk** or by post to:
Chris Wood, c/o Talent, Ragdoll Productions Ltd., Timothy's Bridge Road, Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire CV37 9NQ



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COMEDY MUSIC/COMPOSER

Ragdoll

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Timothy's Bridge Road, Stratford upon Avon
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All CDs will be returned.

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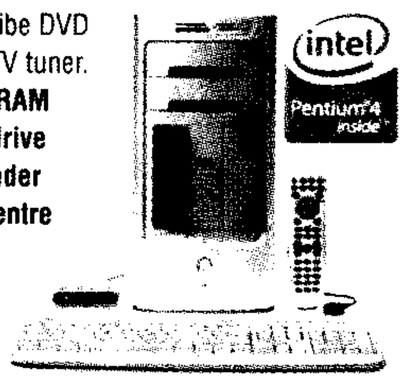

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- **TV & FM radio tuner, 9-in-1 card reader**
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Stock status: Brand new stock
Warranty: 1 year warranty

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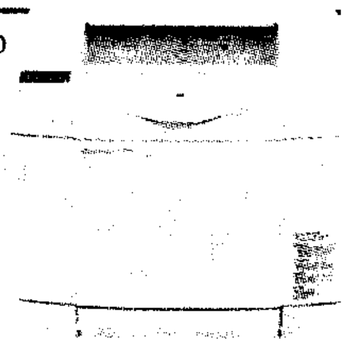

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MEDION GOPAL SAT NAV

Easy to use compact portable GPS with 2.8" touchscreen display.

- **Full UK and Ireland NAVTEQ maps**
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- **SD/MMC card reader, full car kit**
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Stock status: Factory rework stock
Warranty: 1 year warranty

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MEDION

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Enjoy mobile entertainment more with this powerful 17" widescreen Ultrabright 1440 x 900 display.

- **Intel Core 2 Duo T5300 (1.73GHz), 2GB RAM**
- **120GB hard drive, DVD writer, WiFi, LAN**
- **Intel 224MB shared graphics, card reader**
- **High def stereo sound, Vista Home Premium**

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Warranty: 1 year warranty

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Gateway

HP L1740 17" TFT DISPLAY

- **1280 x 1024 res, fast 8ms response time**
- **High adjustment, pivot & wall mountable**
- **Built-in USB hub, VGA & DVI connections**

Good as new stock, 1 year warranty

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- **High speed wireless connection via USB**
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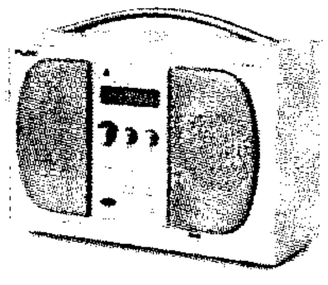

Fully portable DAB digital radio tuner with FM mode, battery power option.

- **Massive range of DAB stations**
- **Select stations by name**
- **Scrolling text shows content**
- **High quality 3" stereo speakers**

Stock status: Grade A like new stock
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PURE DIGITAL

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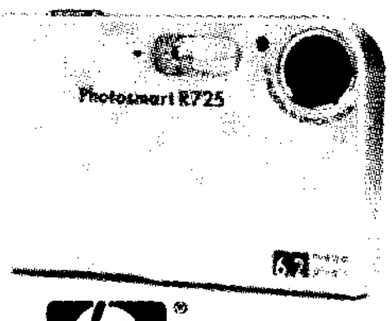

Hi-res 6.2 megapixel camera with 3x optical & 8x digital zoom & large 2" LCD display

- **Slimline aluminium body camera**
- **Choice of 12 shooting modes**
- **Auto flash with red eye reduction**
- **Rechargable battery, SD card storage**

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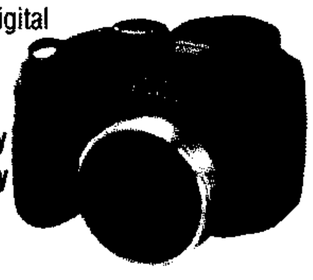

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- **High resolution 7.1 megapixel lens**
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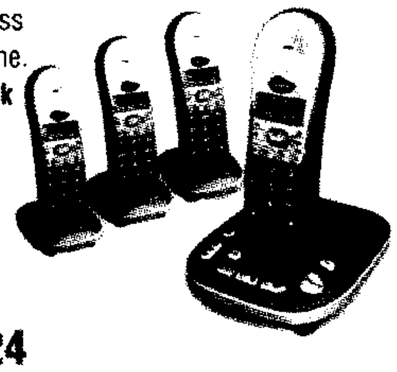

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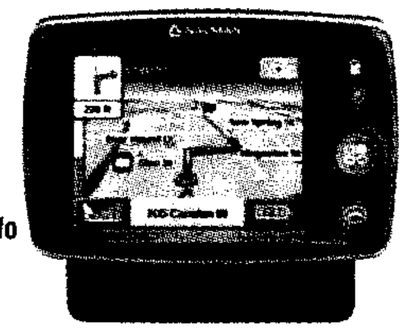

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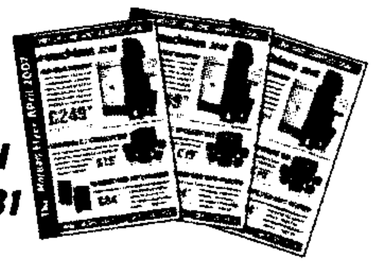

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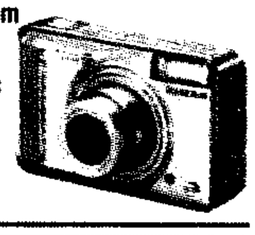

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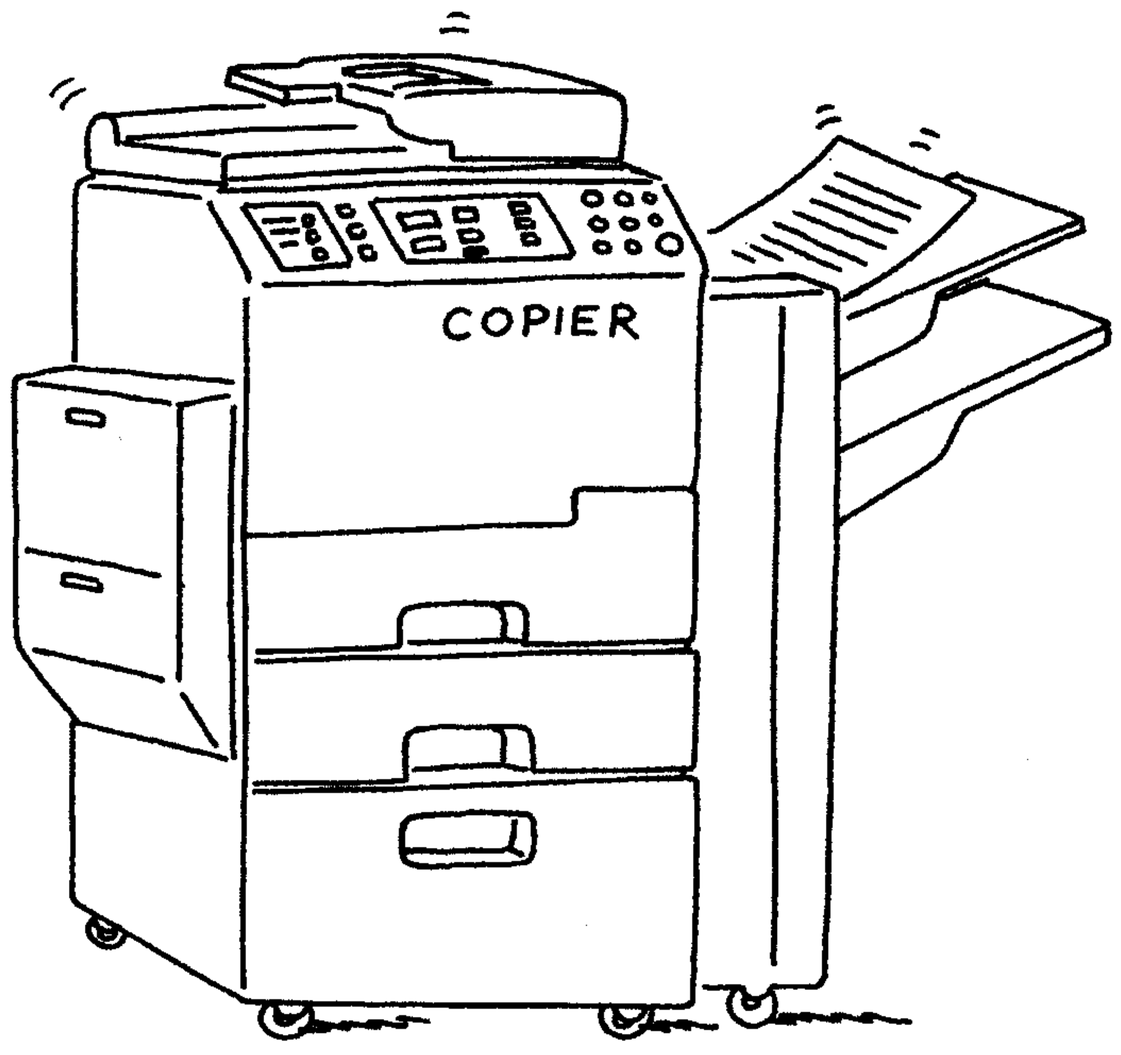

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